

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY,
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
WASHINGTON, D.C.

INTERVIEW OF: NICHOLAS RASMUSSEN

Monday, May 15, 2023

Washington, D.C.

The interview in the above matter was held in room 2237, Rayburn House Office Building, commencing at 9:59 a.m.

Present: Representative Gaetz.

Appearances:

For the COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY:

[REDACTED], GENERAL COUNSEL
[REDACTED], CHIEF COUNSEL FOR OVERSIGHT
[REDACTED], COUNSEL
[REDACTED], SPECIAL COUNSEL
[REDACTED], SENIOR SPECIAL COUNSEL
[REDACTED], DIGITAL DIRECTOR
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[REDACTED], MINORITY INTERN
[REDACTED], MINORITY STAFF ASSISTANT
[REDACTED], MINORITY INTERN

For the PERMANENT SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE:

[REDACTED], STAFF DIRECTOR, SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
INVESTIGATIONS
[REDACTED], COUNSEL
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For NICHOLAS RASMUSSEN:

ROBERT LITT, ESQ.

HAYDN FORREST, ESQ.

Morrison & Foerster LLP

2100 L Street NW, Suite 900

Washington, D.C. 20037

Mr. [REDACTED]: Good morning. This is a transcribed interview of Mr. Nick Rasmussen, former director of the National Counterterrorism Center. Chairman Jordan and Chairman Turner have requested this interview as part of the committee's investigation of oversight of Federal law enforcement and intelligence matters within our respective jurisdictions.

Could the witness please state your name for the record?

Mr. Rasmussen. Sure. Nicholas "Nick" Rasmussen.

Mr. [REDACTED]: And you're joined here by counsel. I'll have them introduce themselves as well.

Mr. Litt. Robert Litt from Morrison & Foerster.

Mr. Forrest. Haydn Forrest, also from Morrison Foerster.

Mr. [REDACTED]: And I'll have the staffers introduce themselves. My name is [REDACTED]. I'm with Mr. Jordan's staff on the majority of the House Judiciary Committee.

Mr. [REDACTED]: [REDACTED], senior special counsel with Mr. Jordan on the House Judiciary Committee.

Mr. [REDACTED]: [REDACTED], House majority, Judiciary.

Mr. [REDACTED]: [REDACTED], counsel with Chairman Jordan's office.

Mr. [REDACTED]: And minority staff.

Ms. [REDACTED]: [REDACTED], chief oversight counsel for the House Judiciary Committee, Democratic staff.

Mr. [REDACTED]: [REDACTED] with the House Intelligence Committee, Mr. Himes, in the minority.

Ms. [REDACTED]: [REDACTED], House Judiciary Committee.

Ms. [REDACTED]: [REDACTED] with Ranking Member Nadler.

Mr. [REDACTED]: We're also joined by one of our members.

Mr. Gaetz. Matt Gaetz, House majority, Judiciary.

Mr. Rasmussen. Good to see you, sir.

Mr. [REDACTED]. This investigation serves to inform potential legislative reforms within our various jurisdictions.

On behalf of the committees, I want to thank you for appearing here today to answer our questions. The chairman also appreciates, of course, your willingness to appear here voluntarily.

I'd like to go over the ground rules that we will follow during today's interview. Our questioning will proceed in rounds. The majority will ask questions first for up to an hour, and then the minority will have a chance to ask questions for an hour as well. We'll alternate back and forth until we're done, and we certainly will do our very best to make this go as quickly as possible.

Mr. Rasmussen. Thank you.

Mr. [REDACTED]. We do not want to belabor anything.

Typically, we'll take a short break at the end of each hour, but if you'd like to take a break apart from that, just let us know, we're happy to facilitate that.

As you can see, a court reporter is here, taking down everything we say. Sometimes we'll end up talking over one another. Usually that's our bad. And if that's the case, we might have to back up and restate a question, so forth.

We want you to answer our questions in the most complete and truthful manner possible, so we'll take our time. If you have any questions or don't understand what we're asking, just let us know, we'll try to rephrase.

If you honestly don't know the answer to a question or don't remember, it's, of course, best not to guess. Just tell us what you do remember. Federal Rules of Evidence aren't in play here, so there's no hearsay objections or foundation or any of that

kind of material from the Federal Rules of Evidence. So if you learned something from a third party or you overheard a conversation, you can just tell us how you came to learn something.

And you understand that although this interview is not under oath, by law you're required to answer questions from Congress truthfully. Do you understand that.

Mr. Rasmussen. Yes, sir.

Mr. [REDACTED]. And 18 United States Code 1001 deals with those issues. You understand that?

Mr. Rasmussen. Yes.

Mr. [REDACTED]. We try to keep the information we cover confidential, so to the extent you can help us with that, we would appreciate that.

And to the extent we have exhibits that we mark, even if it's material that you've produced, at the end of the interview, we will actually collect the exhibits.

The exhibits we use do serve as somewhat of a roadmap of the types of things we're interested in. So the fact that we're using it becomes -- you know, we believe it's confidential, and we've got to collect that.

Ms. [REDACTED], do you have anything you want to --

Ms. [REDACTED]. No. Just thank you to the witness for taking time out of your schedule to come here today.

Mr. Litt. Can I just briefly note that Mr. Rasmussen is currently an official at the Department of Homeland Security.

Mr. [REDACTED]. Okay.

Mr. Litt. He didn't join DHS until considerably after the events that are the subject of this interview, and his current position has nothing to do with that. I will ask that you not ask him questions about his current duties.

Mr. [REDACTED]: Okay.

Mr. Litt. And if you want to cover that, just go through the normal oversight processes with the Department.

Mr. [REDACTED]: Okay. And then one last thing before I turn it over to my colleague, Mr. [REDACTED].

We do appreciate the letter that was signed, every person that signed it has, you know, First Amendment freedom, and they're free to engage in politics, and they're free to engage in anything, you know, anything they want under the First Amendment, and we do appreciate that.

The concerns that our members have is that when you attach your former titles to a letter of that type, it gives the perception, rightly or wrongly, that the signers are speaking from, you know, a set of information that is unavailable to the public because of the history and the former duties that you've had. So just wanted to put that on the record right away.

Mr. Rasmussen. Okay.

Mr. [REDACTED]: We appreciate your First Amendment rights, and we're not trying to say that you're, you know, not free to sign these types of letters or engage in politics for any candidate you want.

Mr. Rasmussen. Okay.

Mr. [REDACTED]: And with that, I'll turn it over to my colleague.

Mr. [REDACTED]: Thank you, [REDACTED].

Mr. [REDACTED]: It's 10:06.

EXAMINATION

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q Mr. Rasmussen, you have a pretty extensive background in

counterterrorism. If you would, please give the committee a brief background of your professional experience.

A I entered government in 1991 and worked the first decade-plus of my career at the State Department on a range of national security issues, to include North Korea nuclear matters, the Arab-Israeli peace process, political military issues in the Persian Gulf region in the aftermath of the first Gulf war.

The time of the 9/11 attacks, my career took kind of a hard right turn into the counterterrorism space more specifically. I accepted a position to work on President Bush's National Security Council staff in the counterterrorism -- what was then the Office of Transnational Threats, in the days immediately after 9/11, working for President Bush's NSC staff. Then, had a period at the National Counterterrorism Center in its early startup days, and then returned to the National Security Council staff under President Bush towards the end of his second term and finished the President Bush's term on the National Security Council staff and focused on counterterrorism.

I was held over into President Obama's National Security Council staff as the senior director for counterterrorism. Remained in that role for a number of years before transitioning to the National Counterterrorism Center, where I was then the deputy director for a period of time and then nominated by President Obama to be the director of the National Counterterrorism Center in 2009 -- in 2009 -- 2014, confirmed by the Senate and held the role from 2014 until the end of 2017, at which point I resigned and retired from government service.

Q Why did you resign from government service?

A It was kind of a completion of a 3-year term. There was nothing specified about a 3-year term, but that seemed to me to be a logical and good break point for service in a role like the director of NCTC.

When the Obama administration transitioned to the Trump administration, the Director of National Intelligence -- the incoming Director of National Intelligence, Senator Dan Coats, with whom I had a good, positive working relationship during his service on SSCI, along with one or two other officials in the new administration, urged me to consider staying, and President Trump's team did ask me to stay for a period of time, and I stayed until, as I said, the end of the -- pretty much the end of that first year and then just resigned and retired.

Q Okay. So are you retired, or do you do anything else now?

A I retired as kind of -- I retired from Federal Government service. I held a couple of positions post-government service, but then in November of last year, returned to government service at the Department of Homeland Security where I serve as the coordinator for counterterrorism for Secretary Mayorkas and the Department.

Q Between the time you resigned from the National Counterterrorism Center and your return from government, what, if anything, were you doing?

A I had --

Q Professionally.

A For the first 2-plus years of that period -- it's covering basically about a 4- to 5-year period outside government service. For the first 2-plus years of that, I was a senior director for counterterrorism programs at the McCain Institute, which is affiliated with Arizona State University, located here in Washington but linked to Arizona State University and Phoenix/Tempe.

I subsequently departed that role in the summer of 2020 and took a role with -- as the first executive director of the GIFCT, the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism, which works with technology companies in the effort to prevent terrorists and violent extremists from using online platforms to engage in their work. And I resigned that

position to return to government service.

Q Why did you return to government service?

A The opportunity to continue to resume serving on a set of issues I care deeply about -- counterterrorism, keeping the American people safe from terrorist attack. There were also at least one or two senior officials at DHS with whom I'd had strong previous working relationships, to include Ken Wainstein, the Under Secretary for Intelligence, who was my boss in President Bush's National Security Council staff. Ken was among those who encouraged me to come back to government service.

Q Okay. Now, you were one of the 51 former intelligence officials who signed the public statement regarding Hunter Biden's laptop and emails, correct?

A That's correct.

Q I'd like now to enter a document dated October 19, 2020, titled, Public Statement on Hunter Biden's Emails.

[Rasmussen Exhibit No. 1.

Was marked for identification.]

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q Mr. Rasmussen, are you familiar with this document?

A Yes, I am.

Q Have you reviewed the document before you came in to testify today?

A Yes, I have.

Q When did you review that document?

A When I was in receipt of the chairman's letter requesting that I cooperate with the committee and then subsequent encounters preparing for this session.

Q How would you describe this document?

A I would describe it as a statement by a collection of former national security

and intelligence officials expressing an opinion at a key moment leading into an election season when a -- expressing an opinion on a matter of emerging public policy at a moment leading into an election season.

Q What do you understand the intent of this public statement to be?

A From my perspective, the intent of the statement was to alert the public to the possibility, potentially even the likelihood, that the emergence of information tied to the Hunter Biden laptop was worthy of further scrutiny, that it might be -- could well be a injection by an outside actor, specifically the Russian Government or Russian actors, into an act of election interference.

And so I saw the letter as an opportunity to alert and to urge further scrutiny so that people take it -- not take at face value that which they may read, but may lead them to look more deeply into it.

Q Now, prior to receiving the draft of the public statement, were you aware of the Hunter Biden laptop email story?

A To the best of my recollection, just broad news -- broad news exposure.

Q Did you have any concerns about that information prior to receiving the public statement draft, to your knowledge?

A I cannot recall.

Q When you received the first draft of this statement, did you review it in full?

A I reviewed it, yes.

Q And what were your thoughts, if you can recall?

A I read it. I felt like it was -- the most important thing from my perspective was to focus on the caveating language, because I knew -- at least based on what I knew, that there was not certainty about the providence of the laptop issue. And so I focused in on the paragraph in particular that stated quite clearly that we did not know if the

emails are genuine or not and that we did not have evidence of Russian Government involvement, just that this confluence of events makes us deeply suspicious.

So I wanted to make sure, in my own mind, that I was comfortable with that caveating language because to me that was the critical language.

Q So you were more concerned with the caveat language than the actual thrust of the public statement itself that this could be a Russian information operation?

A I wouldn't say I was more concerned. It's just that's the part I focused in on, because if I was going to attach my name to it, I wanted to be sure that it accurately reflected what was known and what was unknown.

Q What was known prior to your reviewing this public statement draft?

A I can't recall exactly with precision what was known or unknown.

Q Doesn't have to be precise. Best of your recollection.

Mr. Litt. Do you mean about the statement in particular or about -- sorry -- about the laptop in particular or about what's covered by the statement?

Mr. [REDACTED]. About the laptop in particular, which is ultimately the thrust of the statement.

Mr. Rasmussen. I was broadly aware that the laptop had been found or unearthed and that it contained information on it that was purported to be reflective of various business activities and personal activities that Hunter Biden may have been involved in. A broad -- broad -- that is my recollection of my state of awareness at the time.

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q That's all we're asking.

A Yeah.

Q And included in that, also the potential business dealings or knowledge of

then Vice President Biden, correct?

A Again, that was not where my mind was focused, but --

Q Did you draft this statement in any way?

A I did not.

Q And when did you first become aware of this statement?

A I became aware of it when Michael Morell emailed me, along with -- I was bcc'd on an email that I don't know went to how many other individuals. That was when I became aware of it.

[Rasmussen Exhibit No. 2.

Was marked for identification.]

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q All right. At this time I'd like to enter a draft of the statement that Mr. Morell and Marc Polymeropoulos sent to the potential signatories to the draft statement as exhibit 2. Just take a look at that, Mr. Rasmussen.

A Uh-huh.

Q Are you familiar with this email?

A Broadly speaking, yes.

Q I want to direct your attention to the first paragraph on the first page. The email is from Mr. Morell, and it says: Marc and I drafted the attached because we believe the Russians were involved in some way in the Hunter Biden email issue and because we think Trump will attack Biden on the issue at this week's debate and we want to give the VP a talking point to use in response.

Do you remember -- do you recall reading that email?

A I recall broadly reading that email, but I kind of skipped right to the document, as I recall.

Q But you recall reading that it was for vice -- in part for Vice President Biden to have talking points?

A Yes.

Q How do you know Mr. Morell?

A Through quite a number of years of shared government service, during his period of time in senior CIA roles, my period of time at the White House and at the National Counterterrorism Center.

Q Are you friendly outside of professional interactions?

A Friendly, slash, courteous but not close friends.

Q Okay. How do you know Mr. Marc Polymeropoulos?

A I have much less of a relationship with Marc Polymeropoulos. I was aware, broadly speaking, of who he was from his professional reputation but did not know him quite -- did not know him personally.

Q Why do you think these men reached out to you?

A I don't know with certainty, but I suspect that Michael would've included me in a group of individuals he had known and worked with over an extended period of time in the national security and intelligence communities.

Q Have you spoke to him since this public statement?

A I've spoken to Michael in a couple of different settings but not about this at any point.

Q Have you spoken to him recently?

A Not -- I don't believe I've spoken to him this year or recently at all.

Q As far as you know, what role did Mr. Morell play in the creation of the public statement?

A Because I received the email from Mr. Morell, I assumed or made an

assumption that he was the principal drafter of the letter.

Q And forgive me if I asked this, did you have any role whatsoever in creating this document?

A No.

Q Did you advance any edits to the document?

A I did not.

Q Did you convey any concerns about the language of the public statement?

A I did not.

Q So you were satisfied with it as written?

A I didn't have any concerns that I -- that I felt necessary to raise. I recall asking -- assuming that it would go through an editing process, I asked to see a final draft so that I would see it on the back end of whatever editing process others engaged in before agreeing officially to affix my name to it.

Q Okay. And did you speak with Mr. Morell or Mr. Polymeropoulos at any time on the phone around the time of the creation of the public statement?

A No, I did not.

Q Okay. Were you aware of Mr. Morell's outreach efforts to other former officials -- intel officials?

A Only broadly speaking in that I knew I was bcc'd on an email that went to a larger number of individuals. And then in my response, one of the things I requested was to know who the signatories were before -- before officially agreeing.

Mr. [REDACTED]. Yeah, that's the one.

Mr. Gaetz. Why was that important to you?

Mr. Rasmussen. I simply wanted to see if my career, background, and experience fit broadly within the experience and range -- and career experience and

expertise of others who were participating in the -- in the effort.

Mr. Gaetz. And how would you describe that band or group of people who ultimately chose to participate, how would you characterize the group?

Mr. Rasmussen. Individuals with significant national security and intelligence experience, including related to -- that related to matters involving Russia, experience gained over a long period of time across multiple decades.

Mr. Gaetz. Are you a Russia expert?

Mr. Rasmussen. I don't consider myself a Russia expert per se.

Mr. Gaetz. Was it important to you that people who were Russia experts were part of the group?

Mr. Rasmussen. I certainly gave credence to the fact that there were individuals in that group who understood the Russia target, the Russia problem set, from a much closer place of professional association.

Mr. Gaetz. And who were those people?

Mr. Rasmussen. I can't recall, you know, exactly who I was thinking of in that regard. But certainly an official like -- like Michael, who had organized the effort, fit into that category, from my perspective.

Mr. Gaetz. Did John Brennan fit into that category?

Mr. Rasmussen. It did, in my judgment, given his time as director of CIA and career background at CIA, yes.

Mr. Gaetz. And did James Clapper fit that category?

Mr. Rasmussen. Yes. For similar reasons.

Mr. Gaetz. And so is it safe to say if Mr. Clapper, Mr. Brennan, and Mr. Morell had not signed the letter, you would not have seen the Russia expertise that you were looking for when you sought to review the names of the signatories?

Mr. Rasmussen. I don't know that.

Mr. Gaetz. Okay. Is there anyone else you can recall that fit -- you know, because the purpose of our exercise today is to go through all the bases you had to sign this letter. So you've testified now that one of the bases is that with this group of people you felt comfortable that there was sufficient Russia expertise, and so I want to probe that with you and understand it thoroughly and completely.

Mr. Rasmussen. I can't recall specific individuals on whose names I keyed in when going through that list. I did take note of individuals who'd had direct responsibility for Russia-related matters, and their inclusion contributed to my sense of confidence.

Mr. Gaetz. Other than assuring that this group of people contained sufficient Russia expertise since Russia was so central to the letter, was there any other criteria that you were looking for from this group of people before you would agree to join them and sign?

Mr. Rasmussen. Not that I recall specifically.

Mr. Gaetz. So the -- I mean, one of the things we're investigating is, upon receiving this message that is exhibit 2, one group of people immediately said they were gung ho to sign the letter. Another group of people said they would like to see what group they were going to be included in.

You've now testified you're in that second group, but the sole reason you sought that review was subject matter expertise over the contents of the letter.

Mr. Rasmussen. That's what I recall.

Mr. Gaetz. Thank you very much. Appreciate that.

Mr. [REDACTED]. At this point I'd like to enter into the record an email sent from Michael Morell to Nick Shapiro, dated October 19, 2020, at 6:36 a.m., into the record as

exhibit 3.

[Rasmussen Exhibit No. 3.

Was marked for identification.]

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q Mr. Rasmussen, if you'd take a look at that.

Have you had a chance to review that email?

A Yes.

Q Now, do you know Mr. Shapiro?

A I do.

Q How?

A He and I first met when he was a staff member in President Obama's White House National Security Council staff where I was as well, and then he served under John Brennan when John Brennan was director of CIA. I don't know exactly what role he was in, but I know he was part of Director Brennan's team.

Q Were you aware of his role in the propagation of the public statement?

A I don't think I was at the time. I don't recall that I was at the time. Again, the emails -- the email that I received was specifically from Michael.

Q Directing your attention to this email from Mr. Morell to Mr. Shapiro, he indicates on the second paragraph: I've sent a draft to David Kris, Lisa Monaco but have not yet heard back. They should sign.

And then he says: I'm looking for two things, pairs of senior who served in the same position from different administrations -- Hayden and Panetta, Jeh Johnson and Mike Chertoff, Lisa and Ken Wainstein, Clapper and Coats, et cetera -- and then a slew of former IC and national security who worked Russia. Should have something to give to the media through you tomorrow afternoon.

Sitting here today, what is your view having reviewed this email? I presume it's for the first time.

Mr. Litt. What do you mean by what is his view?

Mr. [REDACTED]. What is his opinion on this email?

Mr. Litt. Do you have an opinion on this email?

Mr. Rasmussen. I don't have an opinion on this email. I haven't spent any time thinking about it, and I don't really have a reason to have an opinion about it at this point.

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q Well, do you have an opinion -- okay, withdrawn.

Were you aware of these outreach efforts as outlined in Mr. Morell's email to Mr. Shapiro?

A No, I was not.

Q But now you are, right?

A In a general way. Again, this is the first I've seen this email, so I don't know what was intended by way of specific next steps with the letter. I was not involved in any of that conversation at the time.

Q Well, let me ask you this. Just given your vast experience, does Mr. Morell's articulation of what he's looking for make sense to you in the context of the promotion of the public statement?

A I think he was seeking to have a broadly representative group of national security officials join the letter-writing effort. That's how I interpret it. How I interpret it now.

Q Okay. Have you spoken with any of the individuals named in this email since the public statement?

Mr. Litt. About the statement or about anything?

Mr. [REDACTED]. We'll clarify.

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q About the public statement.

A Only with Mr. Wainstein, because I made him aware when I became the subject of this committee's inquiry. He was a colleague of mine at the Department of Homeland Security and, as I said, had played a role in bringing me back into government service. So I wanted him to be aware of this in case there was media attention to it.

But I haven't spoken about the contact -- content of the letter or the process around which the letter happened. Didn't occur to me to do that with Mr. Wainstein.

Q Did you speak verbally or did you email him or text?

A It would've been all verbal.

Q And when was this?

A I see him on a -- I see him on a daily basis.

I don't have a specific recollection. I just informed him earlier this year when I was in receipt of the committee's request for cooperation.

Q Did you have a role in promoting the public statement upon signing it?

A I did not.

Q Did you do any media or press in connection with the public statement?

A I did not.

Q And I think you testified to this, but let me ask again. Did you have any edits or suggestions as to the language of the public statement?

A I did not. I did not offer Michael any edits.

Q Now, I'll represent to you that we know the statement as published is different from the draft that was originally circulated. In particular, the last two paragraphs -- well, withdrawn.

Let me introduce an exhibit.

Thank you.

At this time I'd like to enter an email sent from Michael Morell to Nick Rasmussen, dated October 19, 2020, at 8:41 a.m., into the record as exhibit 4.

[Rasmussen Exhibit No. 4.

Was marked for identification.]

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q Please review that, Mr. Rasmussen.

A Okay.

Q In particular, I direct your attention to the, I guess the third email on page 1 of exhibit 4. On October 19, 2020, at 8:41 -- we just introduced it -- Mr. Morell says: Nick, attached is the current version letter with the signatories so far. FYI: The last two paras are gone, as some folks thought them too political. Just Russia and intel now. Better.

What do you understand Mr. Morell to be talking about there?

A Only that the letter had been tightened up and narrowed in scope and focus during the editing process.

Q Well, that isn't what he says. He says it was too political, right?

Mr. Litt. You asked him what his understanding was. He gave you his understanding.

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q Well, let me ask it again with the direct focus on him calling it too political. Would you in any way view that beyond just tightening it up?

A I didn't -- I don't recall focusing on that element of it at the time.

Q Directing your attention to exhibit 2, which you should have in front of you --

A Is that the actual letter?

Q Yep.

Mr. Litt. That's the first draft of the letter?

Mr. [REDACTED]. First draft of the letter.

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q Exhibit 2 has an email, and it has the first draft. It should be the third page.

A Uh-huh.

Q Directing your attention to the last two paragraphs of the first draft of the public statement.

For those who argue that it is important for the truth to come out, even if it comes at the cost of foreign interference, let us share our understanding of what transpired between Vice President Biden and the Ukrainians. It is not what Biden's opponents want Americans to think.

Then they go into very particular details of Vice President Biden's interactions or statements with the Prosecutor General of Ukraine, Viktor Shokin.

Is it your view that those last two paragraphs are, in fact, too political to include in this public statement?

A I don't have a view on that. I didn't at the time.

Q You were content to sign this first draft, correct?

A I was content to associate myself with the letter-writing effort. I asked to see an additional draft, and when the draft came, that is what I focused on in reviewing. After the editing process had been completed -- or after the editing process had taken place with others providing edits.

Q Okay. Do you know --

Mr. Gaetz. Just to be clear for the record, you were not one of the people who

sought the removal of these paragraphs, right?

Mr. Rasmussen. No.

Mr. Gaetz. And the condition that you had seemed to have placed on signing the letter wasn't a condition for edits, right?

Mr. Rasmussen. I -- in responding to Michael, I wanted to preserve my flexibility so that I could review the letter again after the editing process --

Mr. Gaetz. Totally understand.

Mr. Rasmussen. -- and then make a judgment and a decision as to whether I was comfortable joining the letter.

Mr. Gaetz. Right. But before these paragraphs that my colleague just identified to you were removed, the only condition you placed upon your willingness to sign it was to see the final edits and to see the final list of people, but you did not condition your signing it on the removal of those paragraphs.

Mr. Rasmussen. Correct.

Mr. Gaetz. And you had indicated, prior to those paragraphs being removed, a willingness to sign it so long as you preserved the flexibility to review the final edits and the final list of signatories?

Mr. Rasmussen. Yes, because I was aware that often in a letter-writing exercise, particularly a group-writing exercise, there can be considerable insertion and deletion of material before something is ready for final review. So that is what I sought to preserve, was my flexibility to make a decision after I had seen that final product.

Mr. Gaetz. Why did these paragraphs not concern you?

Mr. Rasmussen. I don't recall that I had a concern or lack of concern about them at the time. It was a procedural step in my mind to await the next phase of the letter-writing effort before I would render a judgment as to whether I was comfortable

signing or not.

Mr. Gaetz. I thought you'd rendered a judgment that you were okay to sign so long as you saw the final edits and the signatories?

Mr. Rasmussen. Right. And that caveating language that I sent to Michael, you know, in my mind, preserved my flexibility. If the letter were to look very, very different in a way that I was not comfortable with, I could then say, Michael, no, that's not --

Mr. Gaetz. Yeah. I guess I'm trying to understand why you weren't among those pushing for the removal of these references to Shokin.

Mr. Rasmussen. I have no specific recollection of focusing on those paragraphs.

Mr. Gaetz. So those paragraphs didn't strike -- I apologize for speaking over you. I will endeavor --

Mr. Rasmussen. No, I have no specific recollection of focusing on those paragraphs during my initial reading of Michael's initial draft, and then they were absent in the draft that I subsequently reviewed before agreeing, you know, finally to sign the letter.

Mr. Gaetz. So before you saw the final draft, the draft that included these Ukraine references, that didn't seem out of place to you in this letter about Russia?

Mr. Rasmussen. I think I've answered the question. I did not focus on those two paragraphs as standing out in that regard.

Mr. Gaetz. Thank you.

Mr. [REDACTED]. Alluding to Congressman Gaetz' inquiry, I want to direct your attention to an email -- we're still on exhibit 4 -- email from you, October 19, 2020, at 8:27 a.m. And it looks a little cut off, but I'll -- given the recipient is Michael and Marc, I'll represent --

Mr. Litt. It's actually -- the top half of the cutoff line is on the prior page.

Mr. [REDACTED]. Yes, page -- just the first page, yeah, it's the header.

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q So an email from you to Michael and Marc, and it states: I'd be happy to sign, but I'd like to take advantage of your offer to have you share a final list before final approval. As you know, I'm not a Russia expert, per se, so I would just like to see where my name/profile fits in with others who are, in fact, signing it, if that makes sense. I'd appreciate your efforts in taking this on.

Is that an email from you?

A It is.

Q Okay. Now, you state you want to ultimately wait and see who was, in fact, signing on. Why?

A Again, I think I answered this earlier. I wanted to ensure that my experience and the nature of my national security and intelligence experience and professional profile fit reasonably well within the list of other signatories.

Q So let me ask you this. It sounds like what you're saying -- correct me if I'm wrong -- you waited to see if there was a sufficient number of Russia experts who ratified this letter before you signed on?

A I wouldn't put it that specifically. This was a feel thing for me. I wanted to see if individuals with whom I had a comfort level with their expertise, their professionalism, their career experience, were also present in this exercise. And before rendering a final judgment to Michael, I wanted to see if I fit within that grouping.

Q Well, were you comfortable with Michael Morell's experience in this regard?

A Yes, I was.

Q Were you comfortable with Marc Polymeropoulos' experience in this regard?

A Less -- less comprehensively because I knew Marc by reputation, not personally.

Q So I'm going to assume that it was just Mike and Marc, Mr. Morell, Mr. Polymeropoulos, signing this letter. Would you have signed on?

A I don't know.

Q Do you -- are you familiar with the other 50 signatories to this letter?

A Not every single one. Certainly a number of them fall into the category of people with whom I had worked or been associated with during the course of my career.

Q But at some point, did you look at all their names?

A Yes. When Michael shared the list.

Q Were there people, as far as you know, who were not Russia experts who signed on to that letter as well?

A There were people who had specific Russia expertise as reflected in their title or responsibilities. There were other individuals who had broad national security and intelligence experience.

Q Is Russ Travers a Russia expert, as far as you know?

A I don't know the full extent of Mr. Travers' expertise and experience.

Q Would you agree that the American people reading this letter, they would assume that everyone who signed is an expert on the content of what's being put forward in the public statement?

A Ask the question again. I'm sorry. I want to be careful in answering your question.

Mr. [REDACTED] Can I have it read back?

Mr. [REDACTED]. Can we go off the record here for a second?

Mr. Rasmussen. Yeah.

Mr. [REDACTED]. Yeah.

[Discussion off the record.]

Mr. [REDACTED]. Back on the record.

Mr. [REDACTED]. Back on the record.

No, no, you're fine. Let me ask -- I know the gist of the question.

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q Would you agree that if the American people are reading this letter, they would assume all the people who signed it were Russia experts or had an expertise that validates the thrust of this letter?

A I would assume that anyone reading the letter would look at the list and assume that the signatories had relevant expertise of one form or another.

Q Sufficient to make a judgment about whether or not Hunter Biden's laptop and emails were potentially Russian disinformation?

A Sufficient to offer a recommendation or a plea or -- that scrutiny be attached to this and that there were reasons to -- to be skeptical of the providence of the email.

And again, as I pointed out in other -- in response to other questions, I directed my focus principally to the caveating language for that purpose, where we were clear about what was known and not known at that stage.

Q We'll come back to the caveating.

Are you aware that the Hunter Biden laptop and emails have since been authenticated?

A I'm broadly familiar with public reporting on, you know, the Biden laptop issue.

Q In light of that public reporting, do you still believe that the Russians were somehow involved in disseminating the emails from the laptop?

A I don't know with certainty.

Q Well, given your familiarity with the authentication, do you believe the statement that you and others signed should be retracted?

A I don't have a view on whether it should be retracted or not.

Q Do you have any regrets about signing that statement?

A I don't have regrets about signing the statement, given what was known at the time. I regret that the statement has been drawn into a political controversy and regret that that is so.

Mr. Gaetz. Well, wasn't the whole purpose of the statement political, based on that email that you were bcc'd on?

Mr. Rasmussen. Again, that was part of Michael Morell's stated purpose in preparing the letter.

Mr. Gaetz. Well, you've testified to us that you signed the letter because you believed that Mr. Morell was this enlightened Russia expert. He sent you a letter saying that they were doing this to be used in a political debate, and now you're testifying to us that you regret that it was political?

Mr. Rasmussen. My primary purpose in signing the letter was to bring to the public's attention the possibility that this was an act of Russian interference and to urge that this information be viewed critically.

Mr. Gaetz. Okay. Did you have any other purpose than that which you just expressed?

Mr. Rasmussen. I don't recall having any other purpose other than that.

Mr. Gaetz. Okay. And now I want you to list the things that provided your basis for the belief that this may have been Russian interference.

Mr. Rasmussen. I reached that conclusion in my own mind drawing on three

kind of specific, contextual, you know, pieces of information. One is just the long experience that I'd had in the -- as a consumer in the intelligence community, reading intelligence community analysis of Russian activity aimed at influencing politics in adversary nations, to include the United States.

Also kind of front and center in my mind at this particular period was the recently issued report by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, the bipartisan report that had just been issued, I think, in mid, late August of that period, which had concluded, on a bipartisan basis, that there had been Russian efforts to engage in election meddling in the previous election, 2016.

And then I also recall at the time, you know, statements from our intelligence community serving at the time, Bill Evanina, our -- at that time who was the head of the counterintelligence organization in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence -- NCSC, I believe, is the acronym -- who, I can't remember the exact form of words, but came forward with a fairly clear and unequivocal statement that the intelligence community judged the Russians continued to try to engage in meddling.

So that was the backdrop to which -- or the lens through which I looked at the information that was emerging about this and caused me to reach a judgment that this was worthy of scrutiny and deserved to be scrutinized.

Mr. Gaetz. Thank you for laying out those three bases. I want to ask about them individually now.

The Bill Evanina statement, that didn't mention the Hunter Biden at all, did it?

Mr. Rasmussen. I don't recall that it did.

Mr. Gaetz. No. And is there anything about that statement that mentioned anyone in the Biden family at all?

Mr. Rasmussen. I don't recall that it did, no.

Mr. Gaetz. So why did the Evanina statement serve as a basis for your signing this letter?

Mr. Rasmussen. Again, it, in my mind, provided -- it showed to me that our intelligence community still held the view -- held the view that the Russians, in some form or fashion, were continuing to try to engage in election interference in the United States.

Mr. Gaetz. But --

Mr. Rasmussen. That's how I read what he said or interpreted what he said, and, again, that conditioned how I thought about this issue.

Mr. Gaetz. And similarly, the Senate Select Committee report didn't mention anything about the use of --

Mr. Rasmussen. It did not. It did not.

Mr. Gaetz. -- of Hunter Biden's laptop?

Mr. Rasmussen. It did not.

Mr. Litt. You should let him finish the question before you answer.

Mr. Rasmussen. I apologize.

Mr. Gaetz. It's okay. I made the mistake earlier.

Mr. Litt. You're even now.

Mr. Gaetz. And in your long experience as a consumer of intelligence information, did you ever encounter any intelligence regarding the Bidens?

Mr. Litt. You don't have to answer about anything that you learned in a classified context. Not that there necessarily is, but I just want to caution you.

Mr. Rasmussen. Right.

Not that I recall. I have no specific recollection.

Mr. Gaetz. So you never came across anything that you can talk about in this setting where Hunter Biden's foreign activities were scrutinized?

Mr. Rasmussen. Not that I recall, no.

Mr. Gaetz. When you say not that you recall, is it --

Mr. Rasmussen. Again, I'm giving you an honest answer.

Mr. Gaetz. Okay.

Mr. Rasmussen. I have no recollection that I've ever read such a piece of material, ever been exposed to such a piece of material.

Mr. Gaetz. And if -- have you -- are you aware of any materials from the Hunter Biden laptop that have made their way into the public square?

Mr. Rasmussen. Only in the broadest sense, not specifically.

Mr. Gaetz. So have you ever been aware of an entity called SinoHawk?

Mr. Rasmussen. I have no knowledge of -- no -- that name doesn't register with me.

Mr. Gaetz. And are you aware of information from Hunter Biden's laptop becoming public that talked about Hunter Biden engaging in business in Russia?

Mr. Rasmussen. Again, I can remember being broadly familiar with press reporting about this but not with any specificity.

Mr. Gaetz. I mean, if I represent to you that the committee is aware that Hunter Biden was engaged in business deals with Russians, with Ukrainians, does that provide important context for this public statement you signed?

Mr. Rasmussen. At the time I did not have information of that sort available to me.

Mr. Gaetz. If you were aware that Hunter Biden was engaged in business deals with Ukrainians, would you have signed this letter?

Mr. Rasmussen. I don't know because it's a hypothetical, and I don't know what contextual information -- what additional context that information would've provided. I

don't know.

Mr. Gaetz. So same question as to Russia. If you knew that Hunter Biden was involved in business in Russia, would that have given you pause before signing this letter?

Mr. Rasmussen. I don't know. Same answer, because I don't know what the nature of that information might've been.

Mr. Gaetz. You would certainly agree that if Hunter Biden is engaged in influence peddling, whether it's legal or illegal, that would inform on the context of the statement, don't you?

Mr. Rasmussen. I didn't have information to that effect available to me at that time, whether it's accurate or inaccurate. So I can't say as to how that would've informed my decision about signing the letter.

Mr. Gaetz. And Mr. [REDACTED] was right in his preamble, we don't seek to belabor this point, but that really is the essence of why we're asking you these questions, because we're trying to ascertain what laws may need to be changed so that security clearances aren't deployed politically in order to shape how a Presidential debate occurs.

I mean, as you look -- I believe that you are being honest when you say you did not have access to all the information when you signed this statement that you do as you sit here and respond to questions from me. But do you think that Mr. Morell might've known about the Bidens' foreign activities?

Mr. Rasmussen. I don't know what Mr. Morell would know or not know.

Mr. Gaetz. Well, you testified earlier that you based your signature on this statement on your reliance on the experience and credibility of people like Mr. Morell, Mr. Brennan, and Mr. Clapper. So I'm trying to understand what about that experience you really relied upon to know that this was on the up and up.

Mr. Rasmussen. I stated that because I believe it. I believe them to be credible

interlocutors who have longer and deeper experience with Russia matters than my own.

Mr. Gaetz. And you put that in writing, that you were not a Russia expert and so you wanted to see who was there. And so the question is, like, were you used, were you used as a person with very extensive credentials to make a political point?

Mr. Rasmussen. I don't feel that way.

Mr. Gaetz. Why not?

Mr. Rasmussen. I don't feel that way because, as I've said on a couple of occasions this morning, the focus I had in participating in the letter was to ensure that the information that was emerging be viewed critically, skeptically, and with a close, careful eye as to its providence.

Mr. Gaetz. Well, do you think --

Mr. Litt. Can he finish?

Mr. Gaetz. I'm sorry.

Mr. Rasmussen. I'm finished.

Mr. Gaetz. Do you think that the substance of the laptop's contents should similarly be reviewed critically with concern for our country?

Mr. Rasmussen. I believe that any information that bears on our national security should be reviewed and looked at critically.

Mr. Gaetz. Do you believe your participation in this letter harmed the country's ability to assess the information that emerged off this laptop?

Mr. Rasmussen. I don't have any reason to believe that.

Mr. Gaetz. Well, are you aware that this letter was one of the things that tech companies used to suppress their publication?

Mr. Litt. If you're aware of that as a fact, which I don't believe is the case.

Mr. Rasmussen. I'm aware of allegations to that effect, broadly speaking, and I

have no specific knowledge about the way tech companies did or did not.

Mr. Gaetz. Do you have knowledge -- are you aware that media companies used the statement you signed to shape their coverage of the contents of the laptop?

Mr. Rasmussen. Again, I don't have any specific knowledge about decisions made by specific media companies about how that managed a report on this issue.

Mr. Gaetz. If this statement you signed was used by media companies and tech companies to suppress the contents of this laptop, would that concern you?

Mr. Rasmussen. I don't share your factual predicate, so I can't say if that would concern me or not if I don't have the information that grants your premise.

Mr. Gaetz. Well, now that you are aware of the information that is in the public square regarding the contents of the laptop, what efforts have you undertaken to mitigate the perception -- the false perception that this letter gave?

Mr. Rasmussen. I've not been involved in any efforts in the aftermath of this letter that would bear on that question.

Mr. Gaetz. And you feel no obligation to mitigate the effect of this letter?

Mr. Gaetz. In my view, the media has done significant exploration of this set of issues, and I don't know that I could've added significantly to that with anything that I might contribute to that.

Mr. Gaetz. Are you a disinformation expert?

Mr. Rasmussen. I would not describe myself that way, no.

Mr. Gaetz. Have you done any intelligence work in the disinformation space?

Mr. Rasmussen. Other than being broadly exposed to disinformation -- analysis related to the disinformation efforts of our adversaries, no.

Mr. Gaetz. And when you sought review of the other signatories of this letter before participating in it, was it important to you to assess whether any of them were

disinformation specialists?

Mr. Rasmussen. I don't recall that being part of my thought process at the time.

Mr. Gaetz. Do you believe the laptop was Russian disinformation as you sit here today?

Mr. Rasmussen. I don't fully know.

Mr. [REDACTED]. Let me ask one.

Mr. [REDACTED]. Okay.

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q It was fairly well known well before the laptop news came out that Hunter Biden had some business dealings in Ukraine, in China, with Russia. Isn't that correct?

A I believe so.

Q I mean, do you remember the --

A Again, I remember the broad public reporting in newspaper -- or media outlets about that.

Q That he was getting paid a whole lot of money by this Ukrainian consortium of companies, Burisma?

A I recall they were reporting about that, yes.

Q And so when the contents of the laptop came out and started revealing a little bit more about that, did you think that possibly the laptop was authentic, the contents of the laptop?

A Again, as was stated in the draft of the letter, the accuracy or inaccuracy of the contents of the laptop was part of the equation, but in my mind, equally important was the context of injecting information about this at a timely moment in the electoral process.

An information operation, for example, can use -- can use accurate information, but if placed and revealed in such a way as to create, you know, harm or political effect, it can do that. So, again, I had the broad awareness of the Burisma set of issues but not of the laptop's contents.

Q But if somebody's running for President and one of their family members is trading on their name for big money -- big money -- with, you know, at least three of our countries that a lot of national security professionals would describe as adversaries --

Mr. Litt. Are you including Ukraine as an adversary?

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q Well, China, Russia certainly. But there are some elements of the Ukrainian -- you know, there's Russia-aligned elements in Ukraine. And so those Russia-aligned elements in the Ukrainian Government certainly could be described as adversarial.

Don't you think that information is really important for the American people to have in the runup to an election?

A I agree information is relevant for the American people to have. My focus in reviewing the contents of the letter was on the caveating information -- or the caveating statements --

Q Right.

A -- making clear that we did not have all the facts and just urging that careful scrutiny and attention be paid to this with an eye towards the possibility that it may involve Russian interference. That was kind of my core conclusion.

Q The nuance, though, that you offer has a hard time, don't you agree, being, you know, fully understood? Like the Politico article, for example, the headline included disinformation, it's a Russian disinformation operation. The way it was described in the

debate was not nuanced.

A I can't account for how others portray or frame --

Q But wasn't it reasonably foreseeable that this type of letter would get portrayed and not in a nuanced way in today's political environment?

A I don't know what was foreseeable or not foreseeable in that environment.

Q So when Mr. Morell mentioned that it was going to be used for the debate, did it give you an indication that this is a political -- just a political operation that you're participating in?

A I certainly understood that there was a political dimension to the letter-writing effort. But, again, as I've stated a number of times, my particular area of focus was on trying to ensure that the information be lifted up, scrutinized, and evaluated critically for the reasons I've described a couple of different occasions.

Q Okay. And I think Mr. Morell has testified, and Mr. Gaetz or my colleagues can correct me if I'm wrong, but he wanted Joe Biden to win, and he thought this was a good tool to use to help Joe Biden, you know, win the election.

If you knew that was Mr. Morell's, you know, main thrust here, would you have signed the letter?

[11:00 a.m.]

Mr. Rasmussen. I certainly understood that Michael was a supporter of President Biden. I don't know how I would characterize -- I don't know how I would answer your question. It's a hypothetical. I don't know.

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q Okay.

Building on this point that my colleagues have drilled down on, you focused on the caveat. Nevertheless, the email soliciting your signature said "want to give VP a talking point for use in response."

You understood this document would ultimately help the Biden campaign, correct?

A I understood that ultimately, if this effort resulted in scrutiny being applied and that premature conclusions not be reached about the provenance of the laptop, that that would be a worthwhile objective.

Q Let's look at the converse. You are testifying as to: People should be aware, be critical of what they're seeing. But the way in which the public statement was weaponized as in Politico, for instance, saying Russian disinformation, the exact opposite happened, right? It was written off as Russian disinformation, nothing to see there, correct?

A I don't necessarily agree with that characterization, but -- I don't know what you're -- I'm sorry, what are you asking me? You're asking me to agree with that characterization?

Q I'm saying the result of the public statement and how it was promulgated to the American people is in opposite to what you're saying your intent was, that the American people should be aware and scrutinize everything that they're seeing.

A I think there certainly continued to be continued scrutiny on the Hunter Biden laptop issue. So I don't think it removed it from public debate or scrutiny.

Q Well, there was plenty of reporting at the time that there's no "there" there. The intelligence community people said: It's Russian disinformation, there's nothing to see here.

Mr. Litt. Is that a question?

Mr. [REDACTED]. It is.

Mr. Litt. What's the question?

Mr. [REDACTED]. Let's put a question mark on it.

Mr. Litt. Well --

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q In response to what I just said, how do you account for that?

A I can't account for how investigative journalists or other journalists characterize the information that they have available to them.

Q But as someone focused on the caveats, you must have been in some ways disheartened at the fact that none of those caveats were really being put into the public square.

A I don't recall having a view -- I don't recall actually even tracking carefully the reporting on this in the immediate aftermath.

Q One moment, please.

Were you aware that Tony Blinken was employed by the Biden campaign at the time the public statement was released?

A I knew he was associated with the campaign. I don't know about employment. I just have no specific knowledge.

Q At this time, I'd like to enter a statement from Michael Morell, provided to

the committees by his counsel, dated March 28, 2023, into the record as exhibit 5.

[Rasmussen Exhibit No. 5.

Was marked for identification.]

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q Now, this is a lengthy document, Mr. Rasmussen, so I'm just going to direct your attention to the relevant passage. The "Statement on behalf of Michael Morell" is about two pages after the first statement from counsel.

A Uh-huh.

Q Do you see that?

A I do.

Q I'd direct your attention to the fourth paragraph of the first page of Mr. Morell's statement.

A Yep.

Q "Sometime on or about October 17, 2020, Mr. Morell received a phone call from Antony Blinken -- a friend and former colleague -- inquiring as to whether Mr. Morell believed Russia might have been involved in the Hunter Biden email story in some way."

Were you aware of that at the time that you signed the public statement?

A I was not.

You're asking if I was aware that a phone call had taken place?

Q Yes.

A I was not aware.

Q Were you aware that Mr. Morell was communicating with Mr. Blinken in connection with the public statement?

A I have no knowledge of that.

Q At this time, I'd like to enter into the record an email from Antony Blinken to Mr. Morell that contained a USA Today article titled "A tabloid got a trove of data on Hunter Biden from Rudy Giuliani. Now, the FBI is probing a possible disinformation campaign," dated October 17, 2020, 10:53 p.m., as exhibit 6.

[Rasmussen Exhibit No. 6.

Was marked for identification.]

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q For your review, Mr. Rasmussen.

So this is the first page of the email, if you will, and then the final page.

If you look at page 2 of this exhibit, it says, "Andrew Bates, Director of Rapid Response." Do you know who Andrew Bates is?

A I do not.

Q He was the director of rapid response for the Biden campaign.

And Mr. Blinken forwarded that email to Mr. Morell, which, as Mr. Morell testified, ultimately was the impetus for the entire public statement.

Were you aware of these facts?

A No, I was not.

Q Is this the first time you're seeing these documents?

A That's correct.

Q Is this the first time you're learning that Mr. Blinken and Mr. Morell were coordinating to release this public statement?

A Yes, it is.

Mr. Gaetz. Does that surprise you?

Mr. Rasmussen. I don't really have a reaction to that. I would say I would've expected Tony and Michael to have been in contact with each other through this electoral

period, but, beyond that, I don't know what the nature of their contacts would contain.

Mr. Gaetz. What we're trying to understand is, you were using the imprimatur of your security clearance to --

Mr. Litt. I'm sorry. Can you point to where he's using the imprimatur of his security clearance?

Mr. Gaetz. Sure.

Mr. Litt. This is a statement that's repeatedly made, and I don't believe there's any basis for it.

Mr. Gaetz. Do you have a security clearance?

Mr. Rasmussen. I currently hold a security clearance.

Mr. Gaetz. Did you hold a security clearance at the time of when you signed the letter?

Mr. Rasmussen. I did.

Mr. Gaetz. And when you signed the letter, under your name, it was the former position you held, right?

Mr. Rasmussen. Correct.

Mr. Gaetz. And every person who's held that position has had a security clearance, haven't they?

Mr. Rasmussen. That is correct.

Mr. Gaetz. Thank you.

Mr. Litt. Do you eat potatoes for breakfast occasionally?

Mr. Rasmussen. Yes.

Mr. Litt. Okay.

Mr. Gaetz. I wouldn't. They're carby.

Mr. Rasmussen. Yeah. "More than I should" I guess I should've answered.

Mr. Gaetz. Yeah.

So what we're trying to understand is, as you were using the imprimatur of your security clearance to get this letter into the public space, to what extent were you aware of -- or, to what extent would involvement between the organizer of this letter and a Presidential campaign have precluded or invited your involvement?

Mr. Litt. You don't need to accept his characterizations in the first part of the statement if you don't.

Mr. Rasmussen. I don't know how I would've reacted or evaluated the letter effort had I known now that there was engagement between Mr. Morell and the campaign.

Mr. Gaetz. But as you sit here today, the knowledge of this letter would not have been a red flag that would've driven you off this letter?

Mr. Rasmussen. I just said I don't know how it would've affected my decision-making at that time.

Mr. Gaetz. Time's up, so --

Ms. [REDACTED]. We'll go off the record.

[Recess.]

Ms. [REDACTED]. It is 11:16. We can go back on the record. Thank you.

Mr. Rasmussen, good morning again.

Mr. Rasmussen. Good morning.

Ms. [REDACTED]. And thank you again for coming in and taking time out of your busy schedule today.

EXAMINATION

BY MS. [REDACTED]:

Q In the first hour, there was some suggestion about the role your security

clearance may have played in your decision to draft the letter.

I know you said you had a security clearance at the time that the letter was drafted, but did you review any classified information in deciding whether to sign the letter?

A I did not.

Q Did you review any non-public information at all?

A I did not.

Q Okay.

And, in fact, I want to turn to the letter itself, which is exhibit No. 1.

A Uh-huh.

Q This says over and over again, right, that there was no access to non-public information. It says, "We want to emphasize that we do not know if the emails...are genuine or not," in the -- one, two, three, four -- fifth paragraph, right?

A Uh-huh. Yes.

Q And it says on page -- I'm sorry. Two paragraphs down, it says, "There are a number of factors that make us suspicious of Russian involvement." It doesn't say that we have evidence of Russian involvement, correct?

A Correct.

Q On the following page, it says in the third paragraph, "Our view that the Russians are involved...." It says "our view," suggesting an opinion, correct?

A Correct.

Q The following paragraph says, "... media reports say...", right?

A Correct.

Q And that's a reference to media reports that are in the public eye, correct?

A Correct.

Q And then in the final paragraph, it says, "We do not know whether these press reports are accurate...", correct?

A Correct.

Q And, presumably, if there had been access to classified information one way or another or non-public information that could've shed light on this, that statement would have been accurate, right?

A That's right.

Q And so the statement, from your perspective, was accurate and you did not know.

A That is correct.

Q Okay.

In the earlier hour, we talked through disinformation versus information or an influence campaign. And I know you said that you're not an expert in disinformation, but would you say that you're familiar with disinformation as opposed to an influence or an information-based campaign?

A I'm aware of the distinction.

Q Okay. And what's your understanding of that distinction?

A To my understanding, in a very basic sense, disinformation is the use of inaccurate or erroneous information, the deployment of which is designed to achieve political effect and to harm an adversary.

Influence or information operations is similarly intended, in that it's the deployment of information to achieve political effect on an adversary, but it can involve information of all kinds -- erroneous information, inaccurate information, or even truthful, accurate information.

Q And the Russian Government, to your knowledge, has, in fact, used both

methods to interfere in elections both here at home and around the world, correct?

A That's my understanding.

Q Okay.

In the case of an information operation, would you agree that Russia tries to hide its hand entirely or hide behind plausible deniability?

A Yes.

Q Do you have any examples of that?

A I don't have any specific examples in my mind that I can think of, but I can remember reading accounts of Russian activity aimed at affecting political developments in nations in their near abroad -- the Baltic states, states of Eastern Europe -- in which the Russian hand was hidden, though ultimately Russian fingerprints were ultimately found to have existed.

Q Are you familiar with a court case which is called -- captioned "United States v. Internet Research Agency et al."?

A Not based on that identifying information.

Q So the court case, it's the United States against Yevgeny Prigozhin, who was the founder of the Wagner Group, regarding his recruitment of Russian troll factories --

A Yes.

Q -- and others to attack the election in 2016.

Are you familiar with it now?

A Broadly familiar with the Justice Department attempt to prosecute.

Q Okay. I'm going to introduce the indictment from that case into the record.

A Okay.

Q That will be exhibit No. 7.

[Rasmussen Exhibit No. 7.]

Was marked for identification.]

BY MS. [REDACTED]:

Q And I'll give you a minute to look it over. We're going to look at paragraph 4 in here.

A Okay. Paragraph 4 on page 3?

Q Correct, paragraph 4 on page 3. And let me know when you've had a minute to review.

A I've had the opportunity to review.

Q Okay.

So paragraph 4 on page 3 of this indictment says that the Russian defendants in this case posed as U.S. persons and created false U.S. personas, operated social media pages and groups designed to attract U.S. audiences.

"These groups and pages, which addressed divisive U.S. political and social issues, falsely claimed to be controlled by U.S. activists when, in fact, they were controlled by Defendants. Defendants also used the stolen identities of real U.S. persons to post on ORGANIZATION-controlled social media accounts. Over time, these social media accounts became Defendants' means to reach significant numbers of Americans for purposes of interfering with the U.S. political system, including the presidential election of 2016."

Did I read that correctly?

A Yes, you did.

Q So this is an example of Russians using true information to interfere in the 2016 election, correct?

A That's correct. That's my understanding.

Q And just based on your experience in this world broadly, is this type of

activity consistent with how and why Russia works to amplify information online?

A Yes, this, in my experience, is characteristic of Russian information operations.

Q Okay.

Again, based on your long experience in intelligence and national security, do you believe that Russian information, as opposed to disinformation, operations pose a threat to American democracy?

A Yes, I do.

Q Would you agree that making sure that Americans know about Russian efforts to interfere in our elections can play an important role in countering that interference?

A Yes, I believe that.

Q And why is that?

A I think that's important because if one of our principal nation-state adversaries is seeking to affect outcomes, political outcomes or social outcomes, inside the United States at a time of significant political divisiveness in our country, the American people should be aware of that so that they can factor that prospect into how they evaluate the information they consume.

Q So, in other words, by putting more information out to the American public, it helps them make better decisions. Is that a fair way to say it?

A Yes, it is.

Q Okay.

There are some people who say that it doesn't matter where information, whether it's true or false, comes from. So, for example, in October 2020, when Rudy Giuliani was told that information on the laptop might in some way be linked to Russian

intelligence hacking, Giuliani replied, "It wouldn't matter. What's the difference?"

Backing up a step, what's your understanding of who Rudy Giuliani is?

A He was -- I understand him to be the former Mayor of New York City, a prominent public figure, who's been associated with various legal efforts to support former President Trump.

Q Okay. Do you agree with the view that he expressed, that "it wouldn't matter, what's the difference" if the information came from Russia?

A I do not agree with that statement.

Q And why do you say that?

A I say that because, again, I think the idea that one of our principal nation-state adversaries could, at the time of their choosing, inject into our political processes information that would have the impact of affecting or impacting those political processes and outcomes is something that every American should be uncomfortable with and look to avoid.

Q Okay.

Do you agree that Russia interfered in the 2016 election?

A That is my belief based on the material -- or, the information that's been provided to me or that I made access to.

Q Okay.

You said just a minute or two ago that it is helpful in the case of Russian information operations, for example, for the American public to have more information so they can make a better assessment, correct?

A That is correct.

Q In your opinion, before the 2016 election, did the United States Government do a sufficient job of warning the American people about Russian election interference?

A I don't know if I could make a judgment on whether we did enough -- the government did enough in this regard, because I was not privy to the discussions over what information to share or not share.

Q But you agree that, ultimately, Russian interference impacted the American election in 2016?

A I believe that it did.

Q Okay.

In the first hour, you mentioned the three bases that you relied on in deciding, you know, whether to sign the letter, whether there was sufficient evidence of Russian involvement to justify signing it. I want to talk through those bases in a little more detail.

A Sure.

Q And I actually want to -- I'm going to do that by going through the letter, kind of, paragraph by paragraph.

A Okay.

Q So, turning back to exhibit 1. And I'm going to talk through these paragraphs and ask you, you know, if you agree that the information is accurate as contained in the letter.

A Uh-huh.

Q So the very first sentence of the second paragraph of the letter says, "We are also all individuals who see Russia as one of our nation's primary adversaries."

Was that an accurate statement at the time the letter was written?

A I believe so.

Q And do you think it's an accurate statement still today?

A Yes.

Q Do you think there's widespread agreement among United States national security and intelligence experts that Russia was and is still an adversary of the United States?

A I believe there's a consensus in that regard.

Q Okay.

The final sentence of the letter says, "It is high time that Russia stops interfering in our democracy."

And is it fair to say that, from your perspective, the letter's primary focus or purpose was on stopping Russian interference in our elections?

A Yes. Yes.

Q Okay.

I'm sorry to be jumping around, but back on the first page, the last paragraph of the first page, so it's the eighth paragraph of the letter overall, it says, "Such an operation," meaning a Russia cyber hacking operation, "would be consistent with Russian objectives, as outlined publicly and recently by the Intelligence Community, to create political chaos in the United States and to deepen political divisions here but also to undermine the candidacy of former Vice President Biden and thereby help the candidacy of President Trump."

Did I read that correctly?

A Yes, you did.

Q You referenced earlier the statement from Bill Evanina.

A Yes.

Q Is that statement what this is a reference to?

A I believe so. I can't remember with specificity what was in Bill's statement. I just remember the public reporting of it that made -- in which he rendered the judgment

that there was an ongoing effort to meddle or interfere in the ongoing election.

Q And I want to go ahead and introduce Mr. Evanina's statement as exhibit No. 8 now.

A Okay.

[Rasmussen Exhibit No. 8.

Was marked for identification.]

BY MS. [REDACTED]:

Q And I'll give you a minute to review this.

A Okay.

Okay.

Q What's your understanding of who Bill Evanina is or was?

A At the time, I believe he was the senior intelligence community official responsible for issues related to counterintelligence and headed up the NCSC, as I understand it.

Q What's the NCSC? Or, is it correct that the NCSC stands for the National Counterintelligence and Security Center?

A And Security Center, right.

Q And do you consider -- in that role, would Mr. Evanina have had view into the type of intelligence that would permit him to put out a statement of this sort?

A I believe he definitely would've had that access.

Q Okay. Do you believe that -- do you find this statement from him credible?

A I do.

Q Okay.

I want to look at the paragraph that says "RUSSIA." It's on the -- this is printed out from online, but on the printout it's the second page, partway down.

It says, "We assess that Russia is using a range of measures to primarily denigrate former Vice President Biden and what it sees as an anti-Russia 'establishment.' This is consistent with Moscow's public criticism of him when he was Vice President for his role in the Obama Administration's policies on Ukraine and its support for the anti-Putin opposition inside Russia."

Just that first half of that paragraph, that tends to pretty much directly support the statement in the eighth paragraph of the October 19th letter, correct?

A Correct.

Q The letter says that Russia is potentially interfering to create political chaos in the United States to support President Trump and denigrate Biden, correct?

A That is correct.

Q And Evanina's statement says basically exactly that, correct?

A It does.

Q Okay.

Moving on, the ninth paragraph of the October 19th letter -- it's on the top of the next page -- says, "Such an operation," again referring to a Russian information operation, "would be consistent with some of the key methods Russia has used in its now multi-year operation to interfere in our democracy -- the hacking (via cyber operations) and the dumping of accurate information or the distribution of inaccurate or misinformation. Russia did both of these during the 2016 presidential election -- judgments shared by the US Intelligence Community, the investigation into Russian activities by Special Counsel Robert Mueller, and the entirety (all Republicans and Democrats) on the current Senate Intelligence Committee."

Did I read that correctly?

A You did.

Q In the first hour, you referred to the Senate Intelligence Committee assessment as being one of the bases on which you made your judgment to join the letter. What do you recall about that report?

A I recall that the report reached a clear and unequivocal conclusion that there had been Russian activity aimed at impacting the 2016 election.

And I tended to credit that particular report because I had a tremendous amount of personal experience with and direct connection to the members of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence during my period of government service and their highly professional staff. And so the emergence of a bipartisan report that all members -- as I recall, all members participated in the findings -- was a compelling consensus statement about something, and so I tended to credit it as being highly reliable.

Q And the fact that the Senate Intelligence Committee had reached the conclusion that Russia had interfered using these methods in 2016, why was that important for your assessment of the events of 2020?

A I thought it was important because there was no reason to expect that our Russian adversaries would not continue to use these tactics and techniques in future elections, including the one we were involved with in 2020. Nothing had occurred since 2016 to deter the Russians from engaging in that behavior, and so it was my belief that the Russians were continuing to engage in such behavior.

Q And I think in the first hour you were -- the comment was made, but the Senate intelligence report does not mention the Bidens. And putting aside whether that's accurate -- I think the Senate report is 900-and-some pages long, so I don't want you to commit to anything without reviewing it in its entirety -- the real takeaway from that report for you was that the Russians had interfered before and that they would try to do it again.

Is that fair to say?

A It's fair to say my recollection is that it pointed -- that it was -- that they had interfered before. I cannot remember in my reading of the summary conclusions of the report if it pointed to the 2020 election with specificity.

Q Understood. But your understanding, based on your experience, is that this is evidence that Russians had done this in 2016 and --

A Yes. I just want to be precise about what the report said --

Q Understood.

A -- versus my -- the conclusion I drew from the report's conclusions.

Q Understood. And your conclusion was that the Russians would potentially try to do this again?

A Correct.

Q Okay.

The tenth paragraph, which begins -- it's the second paragraph. It continues, "The Russians, according to media reports and cybersecurity experts, targeted Burisma late last year for cyber collection and gained access to its emails."

Do you know if that's an accurate sentence?

A I don't have any specific recollection -- or, I don't have specific information that would tell me whether it was accurate or -- because it's citing media reports, I'm not sure.

Q So I want to introduce as exhibit 9 one of those media reports.

A Uh-huh.

Q This is a January 13, 2020, New York Times article entitled "Russians hacked Ukrainian gas company at the center of impeachment."

[Rasmussen Exhibit No. 9.]

Was marked for identification.]

BY MS. [REDACTED]

Q And I should say, this article was published on January 13, 2020, but it was then updated on October 19, 2020. I just want to be clear for the record.

And let me know when you've had a minute to look it over.

A Okay.

Q So, having reviewed this, do you agree that this article says that the GRU, which is the Russian intelligence directorate, used phishing emails to target Burisma and gain access to their computer systems?

A Yes.

Q Okay. So this is a media report that directly supports that statement in the letter, correct?

A Correct.

Q Okay. So this letter is accurate with respect to that?

A Correct.

Q Okay.

The next sentence in that paragraph references Andrii Derkach. Are you familiar with who Andrii Derkach is?

A Only broadly.

Q And what's your understanding of who he is?

A He's a longtime Ukrainian politician who is under sanction.

Q Okay. And are you familiar with his relationship with Rudy Giuliani?

A Not specifically, no.

Q Okay. But you understand that he was sanctioned?

A Yes.

Q And what's your understanding of the reason that he was sanctioned?

A I actually don't recall the specific reasons why he was under sanction.

Q We're going to introduce as exhibit 10 the Treasury Department's press release announcing the fact that he was sanctioned.

[Rasmussen Exhibit No. 10.

Was marked for identification.]

BY MS. [REDACTED]:

Q This is dated September 20, 2020.

A Okay.

Q So this press release says, in relevant part, that "Treasury designated Andrii Derkach pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 13848 for his efforts to influence the 2020 U.S. presidential election. Derkach, a Member of the Ukrainian Parliament, has been an active Russian agent for over a decade, maintaining close connections with the Russian Intelligence Services. Derkach has directly or indirectly engaged in, sponsored, concealed, or otherwise been complicit in foreign interference in an attempt to undermine the upcoming 2020 U.S. presidential election."

Did I read that correctly?

A Yes, you did.

Q So this sanction notification directly supports the statement in the October 19th letter that says Derkach was sanctioned "for being a 10-year Russian agent interfering in the 2020 election," correct?

A That is correct.

Q And you said that you are -- are you -- I'm sorry, I don't remember if you said. Are you familiar with Rudy Giuliani's connections with Andrii Derkach?

A Only that there was public reporting that they had had a relationship with

each other.

Q Okay.

I want to introduce as exhibit 11 a Daily Beast article published on October 17, 2020. It's entitled "Rudy: Only 50/50 Chance I Worked With a 'Russian Spy' to Dig Dirt on Bidens and Ukraine."

[Rasmussen Exhibit No. 11.

Was marked for identification.]

Mr. Rasmussen. Okay.

BY MS. [REDACTED]:

Q Okay. So this article reports on Giuliani's interactions with Andrii Derkach, right?

A Uh-huh.

Q And it says that he worked with Andrii Derkach to try and push out material damaging to the Bidens, correct?

A Yes, it does.

Q Okay. And it says, in fact, he'd been working on this for many, many months, correct?

A It does.

Q Okay.

On the last page, page 5, Giuliani -- and, I should say, this article is a Daily Beast article but it's taken from a 1-hour interview that the Daily Beast had with Mr. Giuliani directly.

On page 5: "[Mr.] Giuliani said he viewed his latest leak to the New York Post," which is a reference to the Hunter Biden laptop story, "as an extension of his years-long efforts to work with Ukrainians to dig up dirt on the Bidens," correct?

A Correct.

Q Do you think it's concerning that Giuliani seemingly viewed the leak of the laptop as part of his ongoing work with Ukrainians to dig up dirt on the Bidens?

A It certainly contributes to the narrative that the emergence of the Hunter Biden laptop at that particular point in time, in the runup to the election, needed to be scrutinized and understood better.

Q And, in fact, this article came out on October 17, 2020, which is 2 days before the October 19 letter that you signed, correct?

A It was certainly part of that context.

Q So this narrative was out there from Rudy Giuliani himself, correct?

A That's correct.

Q Okay.

Are you aware that the White House was warned that Rudy Giuliani was a target of a Russian intelligence operation to feed misinformation to Trump?

A I'm only vaguely aware of that through public reporting.

Q Okay. To the extent you are aware of that, is that something that would've added to your concern about the Hunter Biden emails potentially being part of a broader Russian effort to interfere in the 2020 election?

A The idea that any Americans would be used -- any Americans with positions of influence would be used by Russian intelligence organizations or Russian operatives to try to advance their work would be a source of concern to me.

Q Okay.

So we've talked through the factors in the letter that led you to decide to sign it that suggest that, in fact, based on what was known at the time, this very well could have been a Russian misinformation operation.

I want to move on to some factors that suggest that Russia actually did, in fact, interfere in the 2020 election.

And, in particular, I want to turn to the January 2021 Intelligence Community Assessment. Do you know offhand if you're familiar with this?

A I don't have specific familiarity with it right now.

Q Okay. We'll go ahead and --

A I would've read it at the time, or certainly the summary at the time.

Q Yep. We're going to introduce it as exhibit 12.

[Rasmussen Exhibit No. 12.]

Was marked for identification.]

BY MS. [REDACTED]:

Q And I can tell you, we're going to focus on Key Judgment 2, which is on the fourth page. But take as long as you need to review the whole thing.

A Okay.

Q Key Judgment 2 reads, "We assess that Russian President Putin authorized, and a range of Russian government organizations conducted, influence operations aimed at denigrating President Biden's candidacy and the Democratic Party, supporting former President Trump, undermining public confidence in the electoral process, and exacerbating sociopolitical divisions in the US. Unlike in 2016, we did not see persistent Russian cyber efforts to gain access to election infrastructure. We have high confidence in our assessment; Russian state and proxy actors who all serve the Kremlin's interests worked to affect US public perceptions in a consistent manner. A key element of Moscow's strategy this election cycle was its use of proxies linked to Russian intelligence to push influence narratives -- including misleading or unsubstantiated allegations against President Biden -- to US media organizations, US officials, and prominent US individuals,

including some close to former President Trump and his administration."

Did I read that correctly?

A You did.

Q What's your understanding of what "high confidence" means?

A "High confidence" is a term of art used in the intelligence community to signify that there is a significant amount of underlying intelligence information that would support the conclusion being drawn.

And so the consumer -- or, the reader, the consumer of the intelligence analysis should have high confidence that the picture being portrayed is an accurate one because of the body of underlying intelligence that supports that conclusion.

Q Okay.

This report comes from the National Intelligence Council, and on the front page it says, "It was drafted by the National Intelligence Council and CIA, DHS, FBI, INR, and NSA, and coordinated with CIA, DHS, FBI, INR, Treasury and NSA."

What's the National Intelligence Council?

A The National Intelligence Council serves under the auspices of the DNI, the Director of National Intelligence, for the purpose of bringing together all of the analytic judgments and conclusions of all of the intelligence agencies spread across our government and coordinating a community-wide judgment or assessment to support decision-makers.

Q And "CIA" here is a reference to the Central Intelligence Agency?

A That's correct.

Q "DHS" is the Department of Homeland Security?

A Yes.

Q "FBI" is the Federal Bureau of Investigation?

A Yes.

Q What's "INR" a reference to?

A The Bureau of Intelligence and Research that sits within the State Department.

Q And "NSA" is the National Security Agency?

A Correct.

Q And "Treasury" here is a reference to the Department of Treasury, correct?

A Correct.

Q So, when this report says that these entities have high confidence in our assessment, that means all of these agencies have high confidence, right?

A Yes. Typically, if any of the agencies did not share the analytic view as drafted, there would be a separate bit of language describing the dissenting view or the contrasting view of one of the other agencies.

Q Understood.

So, going back to the language of Key Judgment 2, the reference to Moscow's strategy being the use of misleading or unsubstantiated allegations and producing those to U.S. media organizations, U.S. officials, and prominent U.S. individuals, is that consistent with the concerns that you expressed in the October 19th letter?

A Yes, it was -- yes, it is.

Q We just talked through the Treasury Department sanctions. This references the use of sanctioned individuals. Was Andrii Derkach an individual who was sanctioned by the United States?

A Yes. Based on the Treasury Department announcement that you shared with me, yes.

Q And the key judgment, made with high confidence, says that some people

close to former President Trump and his administration were involved in the efforts to push out this information.

Is it fair to describe Rudy Giuliani as an individual close to former President Trump and his administration?

A I believe that's a fair description.

Q Okay. Thank you.

We're going to move on a little bit, unless -- did you have further comments?

A No.

Q You made a statement in the first hour that -- you were asked if you regret the letter, and you said that you regret that the statement has been drawn into political controversy. Do you remember saying that?

A I do.

Q Okay.

When the letter was made public on October 19, 2020, you were a private citizen, correct?

A I was.

Q Was Mr. Morell a private citizen?

A He was.

Q Was former CIA Director Brennan a private citizen at that time?

A Yes, he was.

Q What about Mr. Clapper?

A He was, yes, a private citizen.

Q Tony Blinken?

A A private citizen.

Q To your knowledge, were all of the signatories of the letter private citizens at

the time that it was signed?

A Yes, to my knowledge.

Q Okay. Would you agree that, as a private citizen, you have the right to engage in the political process?

A Yes.

Q Would you agree that the First Amendment protected and continues to protect your right to make statements such as those contained in the public letter?

A Yes, I believe that.

Q And do you think all the other signatories also have that First Amendment right?

A I believe that as well.

Q Okay.

To the extent that there's been some suggestion made today that you should have censored your statements or should have, you know, not included your title in signing, do you agree that that's not consistent with your understanding of the First Amendment?

A No, I don't believe it is.

Q It's not consistent with your understanding?

A Right.

Q Okay.

I'm going to briefly introduce two documents that I think you probably have not seen before.

A Okay.

Q Or maybe you have. The first we'll mark as exhibit 13, and the second will be exhibit 14.

The second one is a letter from 235 former military leaders. It's entitled "Open

Letter from Senior Military Leaders." It's not dated.

But I'm also going to introduce a FOX News article that dates it as September 14, 2020. So that's why we're introducing the two of them together.

A Okay.

Q We'll introduce the letter as exhibit 13, and we'll introduce the FOX News article as exhibit 14.

[Rasmussen Exhibit No. 13.

Was marked for identification.]

[Rasmussen Exhibit No. 14.

Was marked for identification.]

Ms. [REDACTED]: [REDACTED], so you said that the letter was 13, article was 14?

Ms. [REDACTED]: Yes. I'm making sure everybody stays awake. Sorry. I said it the opposite way the first time around.

Mr. Rasmussen. Okay.

BY MS. [REDACTED]:

Q Okay.

So the letter from the 235 signatories, it's titled "Open Letter from Senior Military Leaders." This says that the 2020 election could be, quote, "the most important election since our country was founded."

And it argues that, quote, "The Democrats' opposition to border security, their pledge to return to the disastrous Iran nuclear deal, their antagonism towards the police and planned cuts to military spending will leave the United States more vulnerable to foreign enemies."

Did I read that correctly?

A You did.

Q And according to the FOX News article that we introduced alongside it, this letter was published on or around September 14, 2020, correct?

A That's what the news report indicates.

Q Okay.

So who are the signatories of this letter?

A They appear to be a group of retired U.S. military officers at the flag or general officer rank or level.

Q Okay. So, to the extent that they're commenting on potential policy actions under a Democratic administration, do you agree that a reader could view that as thinking, "These individuals have experience in national security, they have experience in defense, they must understand what it means if such cuts were to happen"?

A I would infer that, yes.

Q Okay.

Regardless of whether you agree with what the letter says, do you agree that these signatories, who, again, signed using their titles and using their positions, had a First Amendment right to express their opinions?

A Yes, I believe that.

Q Okay.

There was a comment made earlier that the October 19th letter that you joined was used as a talking point at the second Presidential debate. Do you remember that?

A I do.

Q Okay.

I want to introduce as exhibit 15 the transcript from the first Presidential debate. And I think the full transcript was, like, 90 pages long, so we're just going to introduce the excerpted parts that we're going to reference.

A Okay.

Q This will be exhibit 15.

[Rasmussen Exhibit No. 15.

Was marked for identification.]

Mr. Litt. Can we go off the record for half a second?

Ms. [REDACTED]. Uh-huh.

[Discussion off the record.]

BY MS. [REDACTED]:

Q Sorry. Before we -- you -- sorry. Quickly, back to the letter from the senior military leaders that we talked through, do you know -- you said a number of them were flag officers. Do flag officers generally have a security clearance when they're working as flag officers, to your knowledge?

A Yes, they do.

Q They do. And do they sometimes maintain that after leaving service?

A Depending on the nature of their post-military activities, yes.

Q Okay.

And back to the transcript from the second debate -- the first debate, I'm sorry. From the bottom of the second page, there's a sentence, "As far as the church is concerned and as far as the generals are concerned, we just got the support of 250 military leaders and generals, total support. Law enforcement, almost every law enforcement group in the United States. I have Florida. I have Texas. I have Ohio. I have every...Excuse me, Portland, the sheriff just came out today and he said, 'I support President Trump.'"

Based on what I just read to you, is it accurate to say that the letter from the senior military leaders was not just released prior to the first Presidential debate but

actually played a role at that debate?

A It appears the President used it as a talking point, yes.

Q Okay. And, again, you agree that the senior military leaders had the right to participate in the political process as private citizens?

A Yes.

Q To your knowledge, are these committees investigating the bases on which these 250 military leaders signed and sent this letter?

A Not that I am aware of, no.

Q Okay.

Turning back to the letter that you did sign, the letter doesn't actually endorse a Presidential candidate, right?

A No, it doesn't.

Q Okay. In your opinion, was the letter true and accurate?

A Yes, based on the information we had available to us at the time.

Q Okay.

Has the aftermath of signing the letter, such as the fact that you're subject to a public investigation by this committee, negatively impacted you in any way?

A It's negatively impacted me in that I'm drawn into an investigation when I wish that wasn't so. So I guess that'd be my answer.

Q And I think your name's been in the New York Post, right?

A Yes.

Q Has that had an impact on you?

A It certainly has drawn attention to my name in a way that I would prefer not happen.

Q And why is that?

A I worry about the way that individuals who consume certain news sources might act on or draw conclusions about me or -- draw conclusions about me based on things they may read in media and, therefore, have that play into certain either conspiracy theories that they might have or narratives that might lead them to want to engage in violence.

Q And do you have concerns for your safety?

A I don't have any specific threat information that has, you know, emerged that has given me concern, but I worry about that as an ultimate, you know, possibility --

Q Okay -- go ahead.

A -- if you're cast in a certain light by media activity.

Q Do you think the fact that you're being investigated for having participated in the political process as a private citizen could chill your willingness to sign a letter like this in the future?

A Yes. It would certainly cause me to think carefully about how any expression of political view that I might choose to make would be seen by others or characterized by -- mischaracterized by others.

Q And do you think it's fair to say that somebody watching this investigation from the outside might also think about this when deciding whether or not to sign a letter like this and it could chill their participation as well?

A I believe that, yes.

Q Okay.

We have about 10 minutes left. I want to move on to a line that -- there was a comment made in the first hour about the impact of the letter on social media companies --

A Uh-huh.

Q -- and their decision on how to deal with the letter.

A Okay.

Q The letter was published on October 19, 2020, correct?

A That's correct.

Q And are you familiar with the date of the New York Post story about the Hunter Biden laptop?

A Not specifically unless reminded.

Q Okay. It was October 14, 2020, and we'll go ahead and introduce that.

A Okay.

Q So we'll go ahead and introduce this as exhibit 16, just to establish the fact that it was published on October 14th.

A Uh-huh.

[Rasmussen Exhibit No. 16.

Was marked for identification.]

BY MS. [REDACTED]:

Q And this is just the first page of the article. It kind of printed off weird, so rather than having half of it be spam, we just printed the first page.

A Yep.

Q So you agree that this article was published on -- the New York Post article was published on October 14th?

A Yes.

Q Okay. That was 5 days before your October 19th letter, correct?

A Yes.

Q Okay.

Are you aware of the date that Twitter limited the sharing of links to the laptop

story?

A I don't have specific recollection or knowledge of that.

Q Okay.

I'm going to introduce as exhibit 17 a New York Times story, published on October 16, 2020, entitled "In Reversal, Twitter is No Longer Blocking New York Post Article."

[Rasmussen Exhibit No. 17.

Was marked for identification.]

BY MS. [REDACTED]:

Q Have you seen this before?

A Yes.

Q Okay. According to this article, by October 16th, which was 3 days before your letter was published, following pressure from Republicans, Twitter permitted its users to freely share the New York Post story, correct?

A That's what the article states.

Q So, if that took place 3 days before your letter was even published, your letter couldn't have had any impact on Twitter's decision, correct?

A No.

Q Sorry, is it correct?

A It's correct that it could not have had that impact.

Q Okay.

And I also want to introduce as exhibit 18 an October 15, 2020, article from Business Insider entitled "The New York Post's dubious Hunter Biden article was shared 300,000 times on Facebook even after the company said it limited its reach."

[Rasmussen Exhibit No. 18.

Was marked for identification.]

Mr. Rasmussen. Okay.

BY MS. [REDACTED]:

Q Have you seen this before?

A Not until now.

Q Okay. Do you agree that this article says that Facebook first addressed whether to limit the distribution of the article on October 14, 2020?

A Yes.

Q So, again, that was 5 days before your October 19th letter was made public, right?

A Correct.

Q And in the last paragraph on page 4, the Business Insider article also says that Facebook's approach was consistent with the policy it actually implemented in 2019, correct?

A Correct.

Q And, overall, the article says that, even despite Facebook's attempt to limit the article, it actually still continued to be shared, correct?

A That's correct.

Q So, putting aside whether Facebook's efforts were effective, if Facebook made its decision on October 14th, 5 days before your letter was signed, your letter couldn't have had any impact on Facebook's decision, right?

A That seems right.

Q Okay.

Sorry, just one second.

We can go off the record.

A Okay.

[Recess.]

[12:16 p.m.]

Mr. [REDACTED]: On the record. It's 12:16.

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q Mr. Rasmussen, I want to sort of pick up where my questioning left off on the previous hour.

A Okay.

Q Are you aware that Mr. Morrell had not even read the New York Post story regarding Hunter Biden's laptop and emails?

A I'm not aware of that.

Q Does that surprise you given how involved he was in the public statement?

A I don't -- I'm not surprised or -- I don't know -- I don't know how to answer that question.

Q Since we last -- since we last spoke, have you had time to think about the fact that Secretary Blinken or Tony Blinken, campaign adviser to the Biden campaign, was involved with Mr. Morrell and ultimately this public statement being drafted and promulgated?

A Again, I was not aware of that at the time the email exchanges that I had with Michael were carried out, something I've only learned subsequently in the context of this investigation.

Q Do you think that's something Mr. Morrell should have informed you of before he solicited your signature on the public statement?

A I don't have a view on that.

Q Well, you don't have a personal opinion one way or the other if he should have informed you of all the facts?

A I always welcome additional context.

Q And you did not get it in this case?

A Not on that matter, no.

Q You'd agree that's a pretty significant matter?

A I don't have a view.

Q Did you ever speak to Mr. Blinken about the public statement?

A I have not.

Q Have you had any communications with Andrew Bates from the Biden campaign?

A No, never.

Q It is a fair characterization, in your view, given that Mr. Blinken sent -- forwarded an email from Andrew Bates to Mr. Morrell, that Mr. Morrell was writing this public statement on behalf of the Biden campaign?

A Again, I don't have the full context around which to reach conclusions about the interact -- you know, interactions between third and fourth parties, so --

Q But just given what you know, what is your sense of it?

A I don't have a sense to share. I don't have a -- I haven't given it any thought. I don't have an opinion to offer.

Q And you indicated you did not speak with any journalists in connection with this public statement?

A Not to my recollection.

[Rasmussen Exhibit No. 19.

Was marked for identification.]

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q I'm going to enter into the record as exhibit 19 an email from Michael Morell to Nick Shapiro on October 19, 2020, at 8:21 p.m.

Take a look at that, Mr. Rasmussen.

Mr. [REDACTED]: What number is this?

Mr. [REDACTED]: Nineteen.

Mr. Rasmussen. Okay.

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q You've had a chance to review this?

A Yes.

Q So this email from Mike Morell to Nick Shapiro, directing your attention to the first paragraph -- no. Well, paragraph 1 --

A Yeah.

Q -- as it's marked.

Between us, the campaign would like Shane Harris to go first. Please share with the campaign when you share with Shane. But, by all means, get it to other reporters as well.

What is your understanding of the between us language, between Morell and Shapiro, having reviewed this document?

A I read -- I take between us at face value that Michael is saying to Nick, Don't share this information forward -- any further.

Q Okay.

A Just mechanically.

Q Do you have any idea if the Biden campaign requested that Shane Harris go first?

A I have no knowledge about that.

Q Given that Mr. Morell had not been candid with you about the origins of the public statement, do you review this paragraph "between us" as further keeping you in

the dark about it?

Mr. Litt. You don't need to accept his characterizations.

Mr. Rasmussen. I didn't have any conversations or exchanges related to dissemination of the letter. And I don't share your characterization.

Mr. [REDACTED]. Are you aware that Nick Shapiro did, in fact, share a copy of the email he was sending to journalists with the Biden campaign?

Mr. Rasmussen. I was not aware of that, or I'm not aware of that.

Mr. [REDACTED]. I'm going to enter into the record an email --

Mr. Litt. Before you do, I'm just wondering, is there a reason you're not reading the third paragraph of -- paragraph No. 3 into the record here?

Mr. [REDACTED]. Well, it's in the record. The exhibit's in the record.

Mr. Litt. Okay.

Mr. [REDACTED]. I've -- I'll decide what I read and do not read.

Mr. Litt. Okay.

[Rasmussen Exhibit No. 20.

Was marked for identification.]

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q Here we are.

A Okay.

Q Mr. Rasmussen, this is an email from Nick Shapiro to Andrew Bates, who was the director of rapid response for the Biden campaign. And it's an indication of what Mr. Shapiro sent to the reporters covering the public statement.

Have you reviewed this?

A I have just now.

Q And Nick Shapiro tells Bates, This is what I gave them.

Mr. Litt. Sorry. Oh, got it. Thank you.

Mr. [REDACTED]: Yeah.

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q I understand you're hearing about all of this for the first time today.

A Correct.

Q That's part of why we're doing this, right? That's part of why we're asking questions, what do people know and when.

Given what you've seen today, this is -- you would agree this is pretty extensive coordination between Morell, Shapiro, and the Biden campaign?

A It's clearly communication between Morell and the Biden campaign.

Q You wouldn't describe this as coordination?

A I described it as I just did. Obviously you can use the word "coordination" as well.

Q Well, then that wouldn't be an unfair reading of this, correct?

A That's correct.

Q Okay. And just for the record, you had no coordination with the media in connection with this statement?

A That's correct.

Q Do you have an obligation as a former National Counterterrorism Center director to have things that you write preapproved by the Director of National Intelligence?

A Yes.

Q Did you have that obligation at the time you signed onto the public statement?

A Yes.

Q Did you submit the public statement to the DNI for prepublication review?

A I did not, as I -- my interpretation or my understanding of my obligations and responsibilities is to do so if I am the drafter of said material, and that wasn't the case in this instance.

Q Do you know if Russ Travers submitted the public statement for review to the DNI?

A I don't have any information about that.

[Rasmussen Exhibit No. 21.

Was marked for identification.]

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q I'm going to enter into the record an email from Russ Travers to Mike Morell dated October 19, 2020, at 7:52 a.m., as exhibit 21.

If you would review that, Mr. Rasmussen.

A Okay.

Q Mr. Travers writes to Mr. Morell: Hi Michael. Great initiative. Happy to sign -- is anyone submitting to ODNY prepub. I can, tho the bureaucracy slow rolled me on my last piece.

Did Russ Travers have an obligation to submit the statement to ODNI for prepublication clearance?

A I don't know. Again, I -- I described what I understood my obligations to be.

Q In the event you are required to submit the public statement for prepublication review, what, if any, consequences would befall you for not doing so?

A As I understand it, if I failed to comply with requirements associated with prepublication review, continued holding of my security clearance could be placed in

jeopardy.

Q But it's your testimony you had no obligation to submit this for review to them, correct?

A It's my testimony that I -- my understanding of my obligations was that I had no obligation to do so.

Q As you sit here today, are you aware in the -- are you aware if the ODNY approved this statement --

Mr. Litt. ODNI.

Mr. [REDACTED]. ODNI approved this statement for publication?

Mr. Rasmussen. I'm not aware.

Mr. [REDACTED]. One moment.

[Discussion off the record.]

Mr. [REDACTED]. Ready?

Mr. Litt. Yeah.

Mr. Rasmussen. Yes.

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q Mr. Rasmussen, direct your attention to the public statement. It should be exhibit 1.

A Uh-huh.

Q Paragraph 6, page 1: If we are right, this is Russia trying to influence how Americans vote in this election, and we believe strongly that Americans need to be aware of this.

Is it fair to say, given all we know, that the only people trying to influence the election with respect to this public statement are the people who signed onto it?

A I wouldn't share your characterization. I think, based on other source

material we've discussed today, it's clear to me that Russia was, in fact, trying to influence how Americans voted in the 2016 and 2020 elections. And I continue to believe that Americans need to be made aware of this.

Q But you've mentioned the word "context" before. It's a good word. Let's look at the context of the public statement.

The principal drafter, Mike Morell, said he did this to help Vice President Biden win the Presidency, correct?

A I don't know what Michael said.

Q Well, I'll represent to you he said that.

A Okay. I wasn't present for his --

Q Fair enough.

A -- testimony or -- testimony is not the right word -- conversation.

Q Okay. So isn't, by nature, him disseminating this public statement designed, from his intent, to influence the 2020 Presidential election?

Mr. Litt. You're asking him what Michael's intent was?

Mr. [REDACTED]. Based on Michael Morell's testimony, yes.

Mr. Rasmussen. I -- I can't speak fully and completely to Michael's intent, having only snippets of his words played back to me. I can tell you what my intent was, and my intent was very much to ensure that this information be surfaced and evaluated and scrutinized because of the significant likelihood or possibility that it might be connected to a Russian influence operation. That was my intent.

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q Well, let me ask you this. And I won't belabor this. Just looking at the public statement and looking at the -- the content of the public statement -- that is, Hunter Biden's laptop and emails -- is it more likely than not to help the Biden campaign

than to hurt it if people think it's part of a Russian information operation?

A That may be the ultimate impact, but that's not what motivated my participation in the letter. I was, as I mentioned, pretty squarely focused on the need to surface the idea that the Russians might be again attempting to influence a U.S. Presidential election.

Q Speaking of the Presidential election, did you watch the October 22, 2020, debate between Vice President Joe Biden and then-President Trump?

A I did not.

Q Did you read about it at any point?

A I have no specific recollection, but I almost certainly read about media accounts in the aftermath or watched broadcast media commentary about it.

[Rasmussen Exhibit No. 22.

Was marked for identification.]

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q At this time I'm going to enter into the record as exhibit 22 the first page of the transcript of the Presidential debate between Joe Biden and Donald Trump, and the second page will have the relevant portion that we'll be discussing.

A Okay.

Q Please take a look at that.

I'm not going to ask you to read the entire thing, Mr. Rasmussen. I'm going to direct you to the second page.

A Uh-huh.

Q I'd say if you go down to Welker in bold, about halfway down the page where it says: President Trump, I want to stay on the issue of race. We're talking about the issue --

Do you see that?

A Yes.

Q And then President Trump says: It's the laptop from hell.

And the moderator says: President Trump, we're talking about race right now and I don't -- I do want to stay on the issue of race. President Trump --

Vice President Biden says: Nobody -- Kristen, I have to respond to that.

The moderator says: Please, very quickly.

And then Vice President Biden says: Look, there are 50 former national intelligence folks who said that what this, he's accusing me of is a Russian plan. They have said that this has all the characteristics -- four -- five former heads of the CIA, both parties, say what he's saying is a bunch of garbage. Nobody believes it except him and his good friend Rudy Giuliani.

To which Mr. Trump responds: You mean the laptop is now another Russia, Russia, Russia hoax? You gotta be --

And then Vice President Biden says: That's exactly what -- that's exactly what --

Vice President Biden was, in fact, talking about Hunter Biden's laptop and emails, correct?

A I believe so.

Q Okay. Would you agree with his characterization of your public statement?

A No, I wouldn't agree -- I mean, certainly not a complete explanation of our public statement. Presented in this form in the context of a political debate, it does not provide the full context of the statement.

Q Is this the first you're hearing of that?

A The first I'm hearing of --

Q The first you're hearing that Vice President Biden relied on the public

statement in the Presidential debate -- the final Presidential debate?

A No. I can't remember when I became aware of that, but it's in my -- I was aware of it before today. I don't know exactly when I became aware.

Q And you became aware of how he framed the public statement that you signed onto at some point?

A You know, I don't know that I've ever looked at the words, but, yes, I was aware that he referenced this in the debate.

Q Okay. And you -- and your reaction to this today?

A I don't have a specific reaction.

Q You're not surprised?

A I answered the question. I don't have a specific reaction.

Q Were you aware of some of the other signators to the statement, their desire to help Vice President Biden become President?

A I can't recall any specific knowledge, as I look down the roster of individuals, knowing who was particularly involved in politics at the moment or not. I'm sorry. I don't have specific --

Q Have you spoken with any of those former intel officials since the public statement was released?

Mr. Litt. About the public statement?

Mr. [REDACTED]. About the public statement.

Mr. Rasmussen. Not about the public statement. It just never came up.

Mr. [REDACTED]. Have you spoken with them about the election -- about Vice President Biden being elected President?

Mr. Rasmussen. Certainly talked about broad national political developments.

Mr. [REDACTED]. Okay. I'm entering into the record as exhibit No. 16 an email --

Mr. Litt. Sorry. Which --

Mr. [REDACTED]: Excuse me. Withdrawn. Twenty-three. Thank you for correcting.

[Rasmussen Exhibit No. 23.

Was marked for identification.]

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q I'm entering into the record exhibit No. 23. This is an email from Kristin Wood on October 23rd, 2020, at 3:02 a.m., to Gregory Tarbell and others cc'd.

Mr. Rasmussen, in particular, I direct your attention to the email prior to her response from Gregory Tarbell.

A Okay.

Q Mr. Tarbell writes, October 22nd, 2020, at 10:25 p.m.: TP worked well during the debate. Great idea guys.

And Kristin Wood responds: That was really cool. I hope you are well, Mr. Tarbell.

Do you have any reaction to the fact that some of your fellow signators to the public statement were celebrating how Vice President Biden used the public statement at the debate?

A I don't have any reaction.

Q Are you surprised?

A I don't have any reaction. I don't know Mr. Tarbell or Ms. Wood, so I don't have a reaction.

Q There was some discussion prior about your security clearance, correct?

A That's correct.

Q And you held a security clearance at the time you drafted the -- excuse

me -- withdrawn.

You held a security clearance at the time you signed onto the public statement, correct?

A That's correct.

Q And I'd like -- I think you alluded to this, but in the interest of having a complete record, have you ever had any access to classified information regarding the contents of Hunter Biden's laptop?

A I don't believe so, no.

Q Are you aware if any of your fellow signatories had access to classified information at the time they signed on --

A I'm not aware --

Q -- to the public statement?

A -- of any.

Q Given you and your fellow signatories' prior access as intelligence officials with security clearance, is it fair to say the American people reading the public might have assumed you had access to that information in respect to your public statement?

A I don't think it's fair to assume that because, again, we were clearly listed as former officials. So this was a current issue. And so I think most discerning readers would have assumed these people are out of office now and don't have access to that kind of information.

Q So, then, why sign it as a former intelligence official since you were all out of office?

A Because we would -- we cited our background because our background gave us a basis on which to make analytic judgments about the nature of Russian behavior when it came to Russian involvement in the election. You'll recall, though, that I've said

a number of times that the caveating language was important to me, and so that's the part of it -- the letter that I zeroed in on the most directly, because I wanted to make sure it was clear what we -- that we are, you know, upfront about what was known and not known at that time. But with respect to the question of our clearances, I don't think that was front and center.

Q But you'd agree, by virtue of 51 former, many high-ranking, intelligence officials putting this statement out there prior to the Presidential election, the American people are going to give deference to that -- those judgments and even with the caveats, of course?

A Some segment of the American population may well give deference and may credit the expertise and background of those signing the letter and have that shape their reaction to the information.

Q Let me just ask this. As indicated, the Hunter Biden laptop and email have since been authenticated. Do you have any concerns about whether or not Hunter Biden, given his access to the President, is a national security threat today?

A I don't have any -- any such concerns. I have no basis for having such concerns at this point, and it's not relevant to my -- it's not something I'm thinking about or considering.

Q So given everything you know, you don't have an opinion on this --

A No.

Q -- given your deep experience?

A I don't.

[Rasmussen Exhibit No. 24.]

Was marked for identification.]

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q At this time I'm entering into the record a email from Mike Morell to Mike Hayden and a number of others, including yourself, Mr. Rasmussen, dated February 7, 2023, at 1:39 p.m. And it is an email chain, and I will --

A Uh-huh.

Q -- direct your attention to specific emails, but please review it now in its entirety.

A Yes, I'm familiar with it.

Q I'm directing your attention to the third page of this exhibit, email from John Brennan at -- on February 7, 2023, at 14:18.

A Uh-huh.

Q Mike, thanks for your query. Like you, I'm weighing my options.

And then Mr. Brennan writes: Although I have not yet received any of Mr. Jordan's letters, I find his requests for a transcribed interview and documentation related to my decision to sign a public statement as a private citizen -- italicized in bold -- a gross infringement of my First Amendment right to freedom of speech.

Did John Brennan sign the public statement and write, John Brennan, private citizen, if you know?

A I don't -- I don't believe so.

Q Okay. Did you sign the public statement as Nick Rasmussen, comma, private citizen?

A No, I did not.

Q In fact, you affixed your title to it, Nick Rasmussen, former director, National Counterterrorism Center, correct?

A Yes.

Q Okay. And the theory behind that is, given your deep experience in

counterterrorism, national security, you're somebody the American people should listen to on this topic?

A I'm not saying who they should listen to. I'm -- I believe I have relevant experience and expertise that allowed me to make an informed judgment, and that was offered in the letter.

Q And, in part, you affixed your title to the public statement for the same reasons you waited to see who was going to sign it, right? You wanted to see what level of expertise with respect to Russian information was going to inform -- was going to inform the content of the letter and how it'd be perceived by the American people, correct?

A Again, as I've mentioned earlier, it was important to me in asking to review the list of ultimate finalists of signatories that I -- that my experience and expertise be appropriately placed within that cohort, I guess is the best way to put it.

Q Previously, the minority staff asked you about a number of former military officials who endorsed President Trump for President.

A That's correct.

Q Was that the 2016 or 2020?

A I believe 2020.

Q Okay. As far as their endorsement and what they had to say or write about it, there was, as far as you know, nothing said about potential Russian interference in the election or any other interference?

A I don't believe so, no.

Q And if I understood the line of questioning, the idea was sort of an equivalence, right, between former military people endorsing Trump and the 51 signers saying, Hey, this could be Russian disinformation -- this could be a Russian information operation,

right before the election?

Mr. Litt. Are you asking him why minority counsel asked him a question?

Mr. [REDACTED]. I'm asking him if it's his view that there is an equivalence between former military people endorsing a Presidential candidate, upfront and open, and what the signers of the -- 51 signers of the public statement did when they released their document before the Presidential election.

Mr. Rasmussen. I believe those are -- that the two letter efforts -- letter-writing efforts are comparable expressions of free speech drawing on the experience and background of the individuals who engaged in that free speech. So they're comparable in that regard.

BY MR. [REDACTED]:

Q Mr. Rasmussen, given everything we know, why not just indicate in that letter that this is to help -- that this is to help the Biden for President campaign?

A I don't have an answer to that question. I don't --

Q Well, in retrospect, do you think that would have been advisable?

A I haven't spent a great deal of time in retrospect parsing through decisions I made with the information presented to me at the time, so I -- I don't have an answer to the question. I just don't.

Mr. [REDACTED]. Nothing further.

Mr. Rasmussen. Thank you.

Ms. [REDACTED]. Are we going to go off the record?

Mr. [REDACTED]. Off the record.

[Recess.]

Ms. [REDACTED]. All right. It's 12:48. We can go back on the record.

Mr. Rasmussen. Okay.

BY MS. [REDACTED]:

Q In the prior hour, at the very end of that, you were asked about why wouldn't you just write in the letter that it was an endorsement of President Biden.

Do you think anybody reading the letter would have had any question as to which candidate the letter writers likely supported?

A I suspect not, but it's hard to really know what people read into letters.

Q Right. Right. It would just be an assumption --

A Right.

Q -- but, at the end of the day, it certainly was not an endorsement of Trump, right?

A That's correct.

Q And it would have been more likely to be favoring Biden, correct?

A Correct.

Q Okay. The -- and, in fact, when it was -- it was brought up by Biden, as we just talked through, right?

A Yes.

Q Okay. I want to clarify one statement that was made earlier. You were asked about Mr. Blinken's interactions with Mr. Morell.

A Uh-huh.

Q You had no firsthand knowledge of that, right?

A I had none.

Q So we actually have Mr. Morell's testimony here, and I think the reference was made that Blinken was the cause of the letter or something like that.

Mr. Morell said pretty clearly: He -- meaning Tony Blinken -- asked me if I thought the Russians could be involved in this. As far as I remember, he did not ask me

to put out a statement. So, yes, he triggered the statement. He did not ask for it, as far as my memory goes.

I want to make that memory -- that --

A Okay. I have no knowledge --

Q -- clear.

A -- as I said, of the --

Q Right.

A -- engagement between the two, so --

Q Right. But that wasn't -- that wasn't --

A Right.

Q -- explained in the earlier hour, right, that context?

A Okay.

Q You were also asked about Mr. Shapiro's interactions with Andrew Bates.

Do you recall that?

A I recall.

Q And you said you have no knowledge of that, right?

A That's correct.

Q So Mr. Shapiro actually said on the record that he sent the email to

Mr. Bates, may have had one phone call, he couldn't remember, and that was the extent of their interactions.

Were you aware of that?

A I was not.

Q Okay. So when it was described as extensive interactions between

Mr. Bates and Mr. Shapiro, does one email and possibly a phone call sound like extensive interactions to you?

A Probably not, but, again, I have no --

Q Okay.

A -- awareness of or knowledge of Nick Shapiro's engagements with any of the actors in this --

Q Right. No, but that wasn't made clear --

A Right.

Q -- in the earlier hour, right?

A Okay.

Q And then, finally, you were asked about the question of on the record versus off the record in the email exchange between Mr. Morell and Mr. Shapiro.

A Right.

Q And, again, you weren't privy to that email, right?

A I was not.

Q You're not a custodian of the email. You're not cc'd on it?

A Correct.

Q Okay. So during his testimony before the committee, Mr. Shapiro said: Michael has a history of doing this. I've often -- I worked with Michael for many years, and he often sends me things like, quote, "OTR," end quote, and I often have to say to him, that could mean, quote, "on the record," or, quote, "off the record."

And then he continues on: And so that's a known Michael-Nick problem that I've dealt with for a long time.

Again, you weren't present for this, but I wanted to make the record clear.

A That's correct. And I myself sometimes stumble over whether OTR means on the record or off the record.

Q Understood. Understood.

Mr. Litt. I try to get people I work with to avoid the use of acronyms so I have --

BY MS. [REDACTED]:

Q I want to turn to the comment about the -- the quotes from the first President -- the second Presidential debate.

A Right.

Q And that's exhibit No. 22, I think, unless I marked it down wrong.

A Okay.

Q Okay. So majority counsel read through this section at the bottom of the second page here.

A Uh-huh.

Q And you said that Biden's remarks didn't capture directly -- it could have -- it didn't capture the nuance of what your letter said.

Do you recall saying that?

A Capture fully the -- the nature --

Q Right.

A -- of the statement. That's what I believe.

Q But he did say, They have said this has all the characteristics, which is something that your letter said, right?

A Yes.

Q Right. So he didn't capture the nuance, but he didn't get it completely wrong?

A Right. He paraphrased the one sentence from the letter that speaks to all the hallmarks. He used the word --

Q Right.

A -- "characteristics," but he -- he did use that.

Q Right. And then, in the following sentence, President Trump said: The laptop is now another Russia, Russia, Russia hoax.

What's your understanding of the phrase "Russia, Russia, Russia hoax"?

A Again, I did not watch the debate, so this is my first reading of this statement by former President Trump, but I take this to mean that he's characterizing the Vice President's Biden view of the Hunter -- of the Hunter Biden laptop issue as akin to other so-called Russia, Russia, Russia hoaxes that the President -- that former President Trump believes are unwarranted.

Q And do you think the reference to Russia, Russia, Russia hoax could be a reference to his belief that the Russians did not interfere in the 2016 election?

A It could, but I find it hard to infer --

Q Okay.

A -- what President Trump might have meant there.

Q But to the extent that President Trump has used the phrase "Russia hoax" to refer to allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 election, that's not an accurate statement about what happened in 2016, right? The Russians -- in other words, the Russians did interfere in the 2016 election?

A Yes. Our intelligence community has concluded that the Russians did interfere in that election, and it's also true that the President repeatedly refers to this as a hoax.

Ms. [REDACTED]: Okay. Just one second. I think we're almost done.

Okay. We can go off the record.

[Whereupon, at 12:54 p.m., the interview was adjourned.]

Certificate of Deponent/Interviewee

I have read the foregoing ____ pages, which contain the correct transcript of the answers made by me to the questions therein recorded.

Witness Name

Date

Rasmussen Errata

p. 11 last line, should be “provenance” not “providence.”

p. 45, 2d question – from context it seems like it should read “would not have been accurate.”